



Title: Practitioners' constructions of love in the  
context of Early Childhood Education and Care: a  
narrative inquiry

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Practitioners' constructions of love in the context of Early  
Childhood Education and Care: a narrative inquiry

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**Abstract**

This thesis examines practitioners' constructions of love in the context of their work in Early Childhood Education and Care. Such constructions are of interest since, although the topic is little talked about in professional contexts, and is *infrequently* included in policies or training programmes, past and present educational thinkers have emphasised the importance of love in education. The thesis aims to contribute to understanding about how early years practitioners construct their work in ECEC.

Previous research in this area is explored; it is argued that such research has not focused on practitioners' perspectives on loving children, and has focused instead on such topics as the importance of attachments, issues associated with emotional labour, the notion of ethic of care, the complexity of work with young children, and parental perspectives on the topic of love. The review of the literature showed that not only is the word love rarely used in current research about early years, there is also an absence of the word in policy documents and professional standards.

A broadly social constructionist perspective has been adopted, emphasising that people draw on their social and cultural resources to construct what they say. The thesis resists positivism, and draws on pragmatism as a philosophical perspective and postmodernism as a critical stance. Constructions on the topic of love in ECEC were investigated through individual, unstructured interviews with five practitioners in senior positions in five contrasting early years settings in London.

The participants talked about love with very little prompting. Analysis of the data showed that they constructed love as important for child development, expressed through touch, and as natural. They talked about love in the sense of loving to be with the children, involving them as full human beings, and as different in familial and non-familial contexts. The participants said their training did not prepare them for love. They also said very little about policy. The thesis argues that further research on the topic should be carried out and disseminated more widely in order to facilitate a better understanding about the importance of love in ECEC settings.

*to my children Oliver and Eleanor, my husband, Ed, my parents, Barney and Diana,  
and in loving memory of my daughter Naomi who died of cancer aged 9*

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 What is this thesis about, and what questions does it attempt to answer?

This thesis is about love in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) contexts in England. The research draws on interviews with five early years practitioners and, through the use of a narrative approach, presents an analysis of what they say about love in the context of their professional work in ECEC settings.

The overarching research question is:

- What do ECEC practitioners in diverse early years settings say about their role in relation to loving children in their care?

The subsidiary research questions are:

- What do policies say about love in the context of Early Childhood Education and Care?
- What do ECEC practitioners say about their formal training in relation to loving children in their care?
- What do ECEC practitioners say about their informal, life-learning in relation to loving children in their care?

This research is written within the context of education and care. The term Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is adopted as used by the European Commission to refer to “the essential foundation for successful lifelong learning, social integration, personal development and later employability” (European Commission, 2011, p.1). The Commission emphasised the importance of children’s earliest experiences, and pointed to the need to have highly qualified staff for this education and care work.

I begin this introduction with a critical exploration of the word ‘love’ and what it means in the context of ECEC. I then go on to present my rationale for carrying out the research. This is followed by a summary of the paradigms, theoretical framework and methodology I adopt to construct the thesis.

## 1.2 The word ‘love’: definitions and research questions

Fletcher (1958), in her textbook about nursery teachers and their relationships with young children, noted over half a century ago that...

Nursery school teachers love children. They always have and they always will. But, for a long time we have tried ... to keep away from using the word ‘love’ because it has led to a confusion of meanings. (Fletcher, 1958, p.118)

In order to address this confusion of meaning, I begin with an exploration of the meanings of the word ‘love’. Collins dictionary offers the following definitions:

### Verb

1. To have a great attachment to and affection for
2. To have passionate desire, longing, and feelings for
3. To like or desire (to do something) very much
4. To make love
5. To be in love

### Noun

6. An intense emotion of affection, warmth, fondness, and regard towards a person or thing
7. A deep feeling of sexual attraction and desire
8. Wholehearted liking for or pleasure in something
9. (*Christianity*)
  - a. God’s benevolent attitude towards man
  - b. Man’s attitude of reverent devotion towards God

[www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/English](http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/English)

The dictionary definition of the verb ‘to love’ that most closely fits with my research questions is the first one, namely “to have a great attachment to or affection for” someone. As a noun, the most helpful one is the sixth definition, namely “an intense emotion of affection, warmth, fondness, and regard towards a person”.

The fact that I have chosen to focus on definitions one and six, however, is not to disregard the other definitions since these also have a bearing on the thesis. Some definitions (definitions 2, 4, 5 and 7) allude to love in an erotic, sexual sense. Accordingly, they relate to concerns about the potential for child abuse in the context of ECEC where adults routinely touch children as part of their ‘loving’ relationships with them. Love expressed through touch is something that is greatly feared in the

context of ECEC in England. There is a “moral panic” (Piper and Smith, 2003, p.890) that prevails in relation to the subject of child abuse, reinvigorated with particular force following the Jimmy Savile and Rolf Harris cases in 2014 (Weaver, 2014). The topic of touch is further explored in Chapter three.

The word love also encompasses the early Greek distinctions between ‘eros’, or sexual desire, ‘agape’, or the Christian notion of charity, and ‘philo’, denoting a love of something. Each of these words for love is associated with one or more of the English meanings of love as set out in the Collins dictionary definition:

- ‘Eros’ is associated with definitions 2, 4, 5 and 7
- ‘Agape’ is associated with definition 9
- ‘Philo’ is associated with definitions 3 and 8

Definitions 1 and 6 do not correlate with any of these Greek words, and yet are the ones I have identified as most relevant to this research. Accordingly I use the word ‘love’, not ‘eros’, ‘agape’ or ‘philo’, throughout this thesis. The word love, I have argued, encapsulates a range of meanings, and any one of these meanings might be applied to different people’s constructions of love in ECEC.

### **1.3 Rationale for research**

In the section above I identified a suitable definition of love for the purposes of this thesis. To love, then, is to have a great attachment to and affection for another. Love is also an intense emotion of affection, warmth, fondness, and regard towards another person or thing. In this section I offer my rationale for taking up this topic of love, firstly, based on my interests and experiences, and, secondly, based on my review of the literature related to the topic.

Love in the context of ECEC matters to me very much. As an early years teacher I became aware of the importance of love in the context of my work. I believed I made a difference to the children in my Nursery or Reception classes (ages 3-5), and that this was due less because I was diligent or hard working, applied specific strategies to support the children’s learning and development, or followed particular pedagogic principles, but more as a consequence of love. I devoted my talents, time, emotions and energy to my work, and as each academic year progressed, I grew to love the

children in my class. By the end of the year we became like a family, and it was difficult to say goodbye. This is the aspect of my own experience that sparked my interest in the topic and prompted me to research it.

Love has also been the focus of some research studies; and love-related matters, such as emotions, attachments and care, are widely referred to in the research literature, which I explore and critique in the Chapters two and three. However, there is also a gap in the research literature related to the topic of love in ECEC. While Page (2010, 2011, 2013b) carried out research about love with mothers, and Osgood (2010, 2011, 2012) carried out research about early years professionalism with practitioners, no researchers have previously sought early years practitioners' constructions of love in the context of their work in ECEC settings. In this thesis I seek to find out how practitioners construct love in ECEC.

#### **1.4 Paradigms and framework for research**

In the section above I offered my rationale for taking up the topic of love in ECEC settings based on my own experience and interests as well as on my study of the literature. In this section I introduce the philosophical stances and theoretical perspectives that underpinned this thesis, which I go on to develop in more detail in Chapter four.

In this thesis I resist positivism, and, with reference to Rorty (1982, 1991), lean on pragmatism as a philosophical position. I draw on postmodernism as a critical tool to help me make sense of the data, since, as Atkinson (2003) suggested, postmodernism accepts that there can be no simple answers “in an undeniably complex world” (p.8). I also draw on what “qualitative speakers” (Richardson, 2008, p.476) (de Carteret, 2008, Sikes, 2008, 2009, Pelias, 2011, Denzin, 2011, and St Pierre, 2011) wrote about research.

I build the thesis on a social constructionist (Gergen, 1999, Burr, 2003) theoretical framework. Accordingly, I acknowledge that what the research participants said about love, or the “empirical materials” (Denzin, 2011, p.651) that I gathered, did not necessarily represent what each of them did in their practice. My empirical materials were what the five participants, or “social actors” (Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont,

2003, p.132) involved in this research, said they did or thought in relation to the topic. Additionally, what I write in this thesis “does not function as a mirror” (Kamler and Thomson, 2014, p.11) on the participants’ constructions, but is, rather, my own selection and interpretation of their constructions. As Kamler and Thomson (2014) argue, “the [doctoral] writer imposes her (socially constructed) view of reality through the writing process” (p.11).

From a social constructionist perspective the participants’ life histories and previous experiences can be seen as resources on which they could draw in constructing love in ECEC. From this social constructionist theoretical perspective, I too played a key part both in the construction of the data and the thesis itself. In as much as the participants responded to my questions and talked to me about love, I contributed to what they said. Indeed, they might not have said what they said to someone else, perhaps, or at all, even, had I not asked them to talk about the topic. I also acknowledge that I drew on my own socio-cultural resources to develop and present this research. How I shaped this thesis and the words I chose were drawn from my “intertwined” (Martin and Kamberelis, 2013, p.672), or involved position within the world. In other words, I drew on my experiences of living in the world to develop my arguments and construct this thesis.

Accordingly, I emphasise throughout that I am fully present in the research. In other words, I draw on my own views and perceptions, acquired in part by my own experiences of living in particular physical and cultural surroundings, to develop this research, including the approaches I adopted, my interpretation of the data and the meaning I drew from it. As Sikes and Goodson (2003) proposed, “it is impossible to take the researcher out of any type of research or any stage of the research process” (p.34), and as Kamler and Thomson (2014) argue, people draw on their biographies to construct meaning. Accordingly, much of the thesis is presented in the first person. As Denscombe (2005) suggested, “the researcher’s identity is inevitably an integral part of the analysis and should be acknowledged as such” (p.268).

## **1.5 A qualitative inquiry**

In the section above I introduced the philosophical stances and theoretical perspectives I adopted to construct this thesis. In this section I introduce my

methodology with reasons for choosing particular research methods and approaches, which I go on to critically discuss in detail in Chapter five.

Drawing on my non-positivist, pragmatist, postmodern stances I developed a narrative inquiry. I carried out individual, unstructured “responsive interviews” (Flick, 2014) and undertook a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) of what the participants said. I adopted what I conceptualised as a spiral-patterned methodology. This slow, recursive pattern allowed me time to return to the transcripts repeatedly, re-visit the participants, and carry out different research activities in a layered, cumulative fashion to arrive at new insights. This conceptualization of a spiral-patterned methodology permitted me to engage in a “nonlinear, repetitive kind of knowing” (Halley, 2002, p.91), and go back, reflect and move forward again as often as necessary in the research process. I also include a handful of poems in the data analysis chapter as additional responses to the interviews, and as yet another way of “re-presenting” (Sikes 2009, p.181) the words contained in the interview transcripts. I outline my rationale for doing this in Chapter five.

The analysis of the five interviews is presented in Chapter six. This is organised into themes which emerged from the data, and is supported by quotations from the interview transcripts.

I summarise the key findings and reflect on these in the final chapter. I consider my own learning about research design and reflect on the findings and how they might be taken forward in future research studies.

## 2 REFERENCES TO LOVE IN ECEC

In this chapter I review ECEC policy, guidance, qualifications and research literature and consider the extent to which they refer to love. I begin with an exploration of the meaning of love in a specifically educational sense. I then consider the meaning of care, and the notion of ‘ethic of care’. I follow this with an exploration of notions and topics that frequently recur in the literature about love in ECEC, namely attachment theory and ‘emotional labour’. This review of the literature about love in ECEC also serves to answer one of my research questions: What do policies say about love in the context of Early Childhood Education and Care? Accordingly, I examine love in policy and elaborate on political debates about qualifications and national professional standards.

Like Davies (1982), I adopted an approach whereby I engaged in ongoing reading, before, during and after my field study. My reading fed into my interpretation of the data. The process of working with the literature, then, was not a static, once-and-for-all step in the research, but permeated the whole of the research process.

### 2.1 Meanings of love in educational research

In Chapter one I explored the meaning of the word love in a general sense. In this chapter I develop this and apply the meanings more specifically to the literature related to the topic. The word love has been used in educational contexts in a variety of senses over the centuries. This is illustrated by reviewing the uses that occur in Lawrence’s (1970) book about the growth of modern education, in which she wrote about the educational ideas of different pioneers and thinkers, some of whom talked about love. For example, since 1543, the Jesuit religious order conveyed a belief whereby, when children love their teachers, they are more likely to develop a love for learning (in Lawrence, p.63); Roger Ascham (1515-1568) stressed that love was a more powerful motivator for learning than fear (in Lawrence, p.87); and John Locke (1632-1704) believed that teaching could only be done in the spirit of love (in Lawrence, p.123).

The philosopher Bertrand Russell (1926) also wrote about the importance of love in the early years of education, and argued that love was one of people's "natural impulses" (p.247). He considered love in education important enough to claim that "all that has been done to improve the education of little children has been done by those who love them" (p.185). Russell made a distinction between love in the early years and love in the later years of education. He wrote that love for children was the most important kind of love in the early years, and in later years, it was more important to impart a love of knowledge.

Reviewing literature written at different dates, it is evident that in the mid twentieth century early years writers continued to make references to love. For example, de Lissa (1949), the principal of a teacher training college in London between 1917 and 1946, carried out a study of life in a nursery school. She wrote about children's generosity in showing love to their teachers and of the need for this love to be reliably reciprocated:

The child gives his love very generously to the adults in the nursery schools and expects love from them, especially from his own teacher, and in this he must not be disappointed but must be sure of her response. (de Lissa, 1949, p.143)

Gardner (1956), a reader in Child Development in London, made numerous references to love in her book, *The education of young children*. Although Gardner's book was not specifically about love, her scholarly tome was filled with reference to it. Indeed, she wrote that a child

... often shows very marked improvement, in many and often unexpected ways, once he is convinced that he is really loved and is able to give pleasure by his presence. (Gardner, 1956, p.19)

She used the term "loved people" (p.20) to describe the adults who cared for very young children in nurseries. While she wrote that these 'loved people' were "of less profound importance to a child's feelings" (p.20) than their own parents, she also emphasised that children learn that they can share these loved people without losing their love.

Fletcher (1958), the head of the Institute of Child Study in Toronto, also made frequent reference to love in her study about adults and children in nursery schools.



She wrote about the importance of love between adults and children and stated that although it is not the same as love between parents and children, “it is a love of children which is real, unchanging and very, very understanding” (p.19).

There is evidence that by the 1960s, however, love in educational contexts was less widely encouraged. The psychologist Winnicott (1964) wrote about the importance of love between a mother and a child and how this arose quite naturally:

The early management of an infant is a matter beyond conscious thought and deliberate intention. It is something that becomes possible only through love. (Winnicott, 1964, p.183)

However, he wrote that a teacher should adopt a very different role:

She has, in contrast to the mother, technical knowledge derived from her training, and an attitude of objectivity towards the children under her care. (Winnicott, 1964, p.195)

It seems then, that despite reference to love in educational contexts over the centuries, there was now a need to talk about relationships differently. Winnicott emphasised the more technical role and objective approach to be adopted in non-familial, education and care contexts. A similar stance was adopted by Langford (1968) who wrote that teachers’ attitudes to children “should reflect the necessarily temporary nature of their relationship” (p.144), and that the word love itself has “partiality built in” (p.144).

Over the centuries, then, many educationalists have identified ways in which love plays an important role in education. However, in more recent work, this emphasis has diminished and other words and phrases have been used more widely, for example, care, ethic of care, attachment and emotional labour. These terms and phrases will be the subject of discussion later in this chapter.

Page (2011), in her research about love in ECEC, wrote that “love is not easily defined or discussed” (p.312), and found that, for the parents in her study, the concept was “nebulous” (p.316). From her own perspective as a former ECEC practitioner, however, she understood love as going hand-in-hand with attention to children’s rights (p.313).

In this section I have suggested that love is a notion that has been given different degrees of emphasis in educational contexts over the ages, and that it is conveyed via different words and phrases. In the next section I consider the word ‘care’ in more detail.

## 2.2 ECEC concepts related to love

As I have discussed, ‘love’ is mentioned infrequently in recent literature about ECEC. In the sections below I therefore consider how authors construct the ways in which adults and children relate in ECEC. I organise these discussions under three different conceptual terms:

- Care and ‘ethic of care’
- Attachment theory
- Emotional labour

### 2.2.1 On care and ‘ethic of care’

The word ‘care’ is contained in the phrase Early Childhood Education and Care. Additionally, it is frequently applied in the literature that I draw on for this research about love. The term ‘ethic of care’ has been used to talk about how people apply their experiences of caring and being cared for in their work as carers (Goldstein, 1998, Dahlberg and Moss, 2005, Osgood, 2010, Taggart, 2011). This section begins with a discussion about the word ‘care’ and how it is connected, or not, to love. It then goes on to explore the notion of ‘ethic of care’.

Goldstein (1998) wrote about caring and love together. However, I propose that it is important to be clear about how the two words, love and care, are distinct from each other. Therefore it is worth considering the word ‘care’ in more detail. Collins’ dictionary offers several definitions of the verb ‘to care’, including:

1. To be troubled or concerned; to be affected emotionally
  2. To provide physical needs or help or comfort for
- (<http://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english>)

‘To care’, then, is not the same as love since, according to the second definition, it is about the actions associated with attending to someone’s physical and emotional needs. Additionally, someone might *care* for another person, perhaps even in a

loving way, but not necessarily *love* them. However, although care is more about duty and the actions that need to be taken to meet other people's needs, it is necessarily enacted within relationships (Lynch, Baker and Lyons, 2009) and these relationships may sometimes involve love. Indeed, the first definition implies that carers may feel emotional in relation to the object of their care. Additionally, people may need to call on their inner selves to fulfil their duties of care. Osgood (2012) argued that, for the women in her study, "'a caring self' was intrinsic to their subjective identity formation" (p.139). In other words, being caring was how the practitioners perceived themselves, and how they presented themselves to the world.

The point that, in many situations, people respond ethically to each other without thinking, or in a natural way, was emphasised by Noddings (2007). These activities which she described as caring do not need to be considered or "summoned" (p.222), but are learned through people's own experiences of being cared for. Noddings (2007) proposed that, in non-familial contexts, people need to act ethically out of a sense of duty. In such contexts, she argued that people refer to an "ethic of care" (p.222) to guide their actions, until these become habitual and natural. She argued that people care for others in response to their very human, present needs and demands, and she proposed that such an 'ethic of care' "binds carers and cared-for" (p.225).

From Noddings' perspective, then, practitioners and the children they care for enter into binding relationships that feel comfortable and have their own regular patterns and unique features. To me, these are features of loving relationships. However, not all carers, by default, necessarily love all the children they care for.

Goldstein (1998) applied Noddings' notion of 'ethic of care' to her narrative study of a teacher, concluding that caring for children is an intellectual as well as an emotional act. This was in a late twentieth century context in the United States of America in which "caring and love" (p.259) were considered "very nice" (Goldstein, 1998, p.259), but "not as impressive as scientific knowledge" (p.259). Through Goldstein's prolonged and close observations and conversations with one teacher, she proposed that caring, which she associated with love, was "an action rather than an attribute, a deliberate moral and intellectual stance rather than simply a feeling" (p.259).

A need for practitioners who are caring was emphasised by Manning-Morton and Thorp (2003). An ‘ethic of care’, according to Dahlberg and Moss (2005) and Noddings (2001, 2007), foregrounds dispositions such as being attentive and responsive to another person. Osgood (2010) located the notion of ‘ethic of care’ within a “counter discourse” (p.126) to the neo-liberal, rationalist one, whereby practitioners work with their feelings, in personal relationships and encounters with children, families and communities. Such an ‘ethic of care’ forms part of practitioners’ quest for a version of what Osgood termed “professionalism from within” (p.126), and this will be discussed further in Chapter three.

Work in ECEC is carried out by people who do, think and feel, and who draw on their personal subjectivities as they strive to achieve a “culture of care characterised by affectivity, altruism, self-sacrifice and conscientiousness” (Osgood, 2010, p.126). These acts of care involve encounters with other people, are reciprocal, social, non-hierarchical. Love in ECEC, I suggest, is caught up in these notions of care, and, indeed, frequently involves care. At the same time, and as I have argued, love is also to be distinguished from care, since it is not the same.

### 2.2.2 Attachment theory

It is also important to discuss attachment theory because, as I will show, the word attachment is frequently used in ECEC contexts, whereas love is used more rarely.

Attachment theory was developed by Bowlby in 1951 (Bowlby, 1988) out of a study about the effects of “inadequate maternal care in early childhood” (p.24). It drew attention to the distress of children separated from their loved ones and suggested approaches to compensate or lessen the effects of this. Bowlby emphasised that children form “enduring attachment[s] or attachment bond[s]” (p.32) to very few people. This proximity, he argued, should be reliable and consistent, thereby enabling children to take risks, gradually moving away from their preferred individual. Bowlby (1980) said explicitly that he was writing about love; he described the formation of a bond between a child and an adult as “falling in love” (p.40), and the maintenance of such a bond as “loving someone” (p.40).

Attachment, though not the same as love, is related to it in that young children need to know that particular adults have them in mind, are attentive to their needs, or remain

in close proximity to them. Love cannot occur without such attachment conditions, and attachment as an approach contains signs and behaviours associated with love.

Bowlby's attachment theory is still widely adopted today, as I will discuss in this section. Roberts' (2010) work on emotional wellbeing in young children, for example, stressed the importance of building strong attachments to enable children to develop "loving and secure relationships" (p.58). Cortazar and Herreros's (2010) research about working with children with different attachment styles demonstrated the need for practitioners to strive to understand children's individual attachment histories. The researchers found that a child-centred approach did not work for all children, and some children in their study were not able to engage in play due to their particular attachment histories. Accordingly, they recommended that practitioners build on and respond to children's different attachment styles.

There is a need for practitioners "to offer authentic love and care" (p.1), suggested Read (2010) in her study about the importance of attachment in early years settings. Attachments, for Read, represent

... the unique relationship between a child and his primary caregiver that consists of numerous moment to moment interactions which foster future healthy development. (p.12)

Elfer, Goldschmied and Selleck (2012) described the notion of attachment as being connected to another person by "an elastic thread ... that allows for being apart as well as for being together" (p.23). When a child is well attached they can begin to take risks, explore their environments more confidently, communicate with others, develop independently. When the attachment is unavailable or unreliable, on the other hand, or there is no special person who will "keep [the child] in mind" (Elfer et al, 2012, p.81), the child is likely to be less resilient or able to cope in times of stress.

The need for adults to be emotionally astute was emphasised by O'Connor (2013), especially in their role as "secondary attachment figure[s]" (p.13) for children. O'Connor stressed that children be "warmly loved and cared for, responded to and valued unconditionally" (p.13) in order to build up their life-long resilience. "Loving responses" (O'Connor, 2013, p.13), she advocated, helped children to develop self-esteem and feel "worth loving" (p.13) in return.

The studies mentioned here (Bowlby, 1980, 1988, Read, 2010, Elfer et al, 2012, Roberts, 2010, O'Connor, 2013) emphasised the importance of children developing close attachments to particular adults, and that such opportunities contributed to children's future, healthy emotional development. Other studies (Cortazar and Herreros, 2010) also pointed to the need for practitioners to be attentive to children's different attachment styles and to adapt their practice to match these. Attachment, from these perspectives, was understood as important for children's future healthy emotional development.

With reference to the work of Bowlby, the Department for Education and Skills (2007) stated that children benefit from developing strong relationships with one identified adult or "Key Person" in the setting context. This 'key person' approach has been applied in ECEC settings in England since 2007 (DfES, 2007). Such an approach offers "real daily meaning and emotional significance" (Elfer et al, 2012, p.24) for children and their families, and, as Elfer et al (2012) proposed, allows children to feel special, cherished and carefully attended to, even when they are away from home.

However, at the same time as I articulate my support for this position, I am aware of the counter-argument that suggests attachment may not always be appropriate in ECEC settings. Dencik (1989), Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2007), and Degotardi and Pearson (2009) all questioned the appropriateness of developing close attachments with children in out-of-home contexts. They suggested, instead, that institutional settings offer a qualitatively different, but equally important experience to that offered in familial contexts (a topic I discuss in Chapter three, in Section 3.2.2).

The inappropriateness of developing very close, intimate relationships in out-of-home settings was put forward by Dencik (1989). This emanated from a longitudinal study of childhood, society and development in Nordic countries in which he explained that children in modern Denmark inhabit the *public* world of the nursery, with professional pedagogues who care for them, and the *private* world of the home. Dencik argued that the home, where children are surrounded by their family, was the more appropriate place for developing close relationships thereby allowing children to express their emotions freely. Dencik found very little in the way of public displays of emotion in out-of-home settings, where practitioners were "friendly enough, but

[kept] a distance between themselves and the children” (p.168). He observed that parents, on the other hand, responded to children’s emotions and expressions of feelings, and argued that one of the key functions of the home was to be “an intimacy sanctuary” (p.168).

Dahlberg et al (2007) challenged the trend in England and the United States for institutions to attempt to replicate the home in some way, with practitioners taking on the role of substitute parents, providing “close, intimate relationship[s] with the children” (p.67). They argued, instead, that out-of-home education and care contexts should not be the same as private, familial contexts, and should not be understood in this way. Accordingly, they recommended that early years workers should not take on the role of substitute parents. Intimate relationships, they stressed, belong to “the private domain of the household” (p.81).

This view was taken up by Degotardi and Pearson (2009) who questioned whether attachment theory offered enough of a framework through which to theorise the notion of relationships in settings. They proposed, instead, that there is no need for nurseries and other group care settings to replicate familial homes, and challenged the belief that “attachment theory should be applied universally to formal early childhood contexts” (p.146). In out-of-home contexts, they argued, children build different sorts of relationships with the many adults who care for them, and with the numerous peers they interact with; they are able to form multiple attachments, and experience many different sorts of relationships.

So, on the one hand, some authors (Bowlby, 1988, Read, 2010, Elfer, Goldschmied and Selleck, 2012, O’Connor, 2013) wrote about the importance of attachments in ECEC settings, and, on the other hand, other authors (Dencik, 1989, Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2007, and Degotardi and Pearson, 2009) wrote about the different experiences and quality of relationships that are afforded in non-familial contexts. While I favour the first position, I remain open to the latter one too. I believe that young children benefit from experiencing close attachments to significant adults in non-familial contexts, and that what they experience and learn in these contexts will be different. Further, the fact that there are these different perspectives serves to remind me of the need to be open to a range of responses to my research questions. Accordingly, and as I discuss later in this chapter, and again in Chapter five, it was

important for me to plan the research so that each participant could put forward their own constructions about love.

### 2.2.3 Emotional labour

In the sections above I explored the literature that refers to the notions of care and attachment since these are frequently used where love is not. In this section I explore the notion of ‘emotional labour’ since this notion, too, is sometimes applied in the literature instead of love (Boyer, Reimer and Irvine, 2012).

Hochschild’s (1983) notion of emotional labour was developed in the 1980s with reference to studies of air-hostesses. She wrote about the negative aspects of working with the emotions based on her findings whereby air-hostesses felt drained after a day of being nice to strangers, and were unable to switch off easily. For Hochschild, emotional labour was about emotion management within the workplace. So, in cases where employers require workers to produce an emotional state in another person, the workers need to block out what they really feel.

It is important to qualify that, just as I showed that ‘care’ may not always, by default, involve love, so it is in respect of emotional labour. It does not necessarily follow that emotional labour also involves love. It is true, I suggest, that love cannot occur without emotional investments, and emotional labour contains features associated with love. I am clear, however, that emotional labour is not the same as love. It is, rather, a sociological term that has been developed to discuss emotional aspects of people’s work. Additionally, different practitioners are likely to have different views and experiences about the extent to which they invest their emotional selves in their work, or the extent to which they think this is desirable or not.

The work of early years practitioners, I argue, like the work carried out by air-hostesses in Hochschild’s study, “calls for coordination of mind and feeling” (Hochschild, 1983, p.194), is carried out by people, very often female, and involves their emotions. ECEC practitioners may draw on their emotions, in that they enter into relationships with the children they care for, and these relationships may sometimes touch their emotions. However, a more positive understanding has emerged more recently in relation to emotional labour (Lynch, Baker and Lyons,



2009), and more specifically in the context of ECEC (Boyer, Reimer and Irvine, 2012), and I will discuss these perspectives in turn.

Lynch, Baker and Lyons (2009) wrote about ‘love labour’ instead of emotional labour. They argued that love labour, like emotional labour, “involves physical and mental work as well as emotional work” (p.45). They also emphasised that their conceptualisation of care work as love labour incorporated both the negative and positive aspects of the work. They wrote that, although love labour may be heavy at times, it was also “pure pleasure” (p.45).

Boyer, Reimer and Irvine (2012), too, identified positive feelings in relation to ECEC practitioners’ “emotional investments” (p.529) with children. Some of the practitioner leaders in five nurseries where they conducted their research said that the fact they could develop close relationships with children was a feature they liked about their role. The research showed that developing “emotional bonds” (p.535) with children in nurseries could be “deeply gratifying” (p.535) and “rewarding” (p.535). Accordingly, the authors argued that the affective work carried out by early years practitioners was not the same as the “emotional labour associated with other forms of waged care work” (p.525).

I support the view that presents emotional labour in a positive frame (Lynch, Baker and Lyons, 2009, Boyer, Reimer and Irvine, 2012). These different understandings of emotional labour, however, from undesirable and burdensome at one end of the continuum to desirable and pleasurable at the other, are also helpful, in my view, in that they serve to remind me of the need to be open to the participants’ different constructions of love.

### **2.3 Love in policy**

In this section I explore the notion of love in policy and consider the emphasis given to it, or not, by policy makers. I firstly consider the extent to which love is mentioned in policies, and then how early years qualifications and professional standards support practitioners, or not, to love children in their care. This section also serves to answer one of my research questions: ‘What do policies say about love in the context of Early Childhood Education and Care?’

### 2.3.1 How does love feature in policy documents?

In 2007, the English government introduced the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES, 2007) that brought care and education together into one framework. In 2011 the government in England ordered a review of the Early Years Foundation Stage, concerned that the 2007 documents, established to bring ‘care’ and ‘education’, ‘birth to three’ and ‘three to five’ into one framework, were too complex and contained insufficient reference to school-readiness. The notion of school-readiness became a new government priority.

The ensuing Tickell review (Tickell, 2011) upheld the principles of the original Early Years Foundation Stage framework (DfES, 2007) and proposed that only minor changes be made, particularly in relation to paperwork requirements for practitioners. A revised Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2012c) was launched a year later emphasising the importance of attending carefully to children’s needs. The guidance associated with the framework and commissioned by the government recommended that children benefit from engaging in positive relationships that are “warm and loving” (Early Education, 2012, p.2), and made reference to the importance of attending to children’s attachment needs and providing them with a “secure base” (p.8). In 2013, however, this guidance was removed from the Department for Education website. A new Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2014) was introduced in 2014 with minor changes, but there was no mention of love in this or associated guidance materials (DfE, 2013a).

Following this, the revised early years inspection criteria in England (Ofsted, 2013) included a new requirement for inspectors to report on children’s emotional well-being. Under this inspection framework, inspectors were to consider how well practitioners helped children form “secure emotional attachments” (p.12) and become “emotionally well prepared” (p.12) for their transition to school. Although there was no reference to ‘love’ in the inspection materials, there was an increased emphasis on the need to develop healthy attachments with children in out-of-home contexts and to attend to their emotional development. As I have shown in Section 2.2.2, Bowlby, who first developed attachment theory, saw it as essentially a loving bond.

I have shown that there is minimal reference to love in policy, though there is some acknowledgement by Ofsted (2013) of the need to attend to children's emotional development. On the one hand I regret this lack of reference to love, while on the other hand I hold that it is impossible to legislate on a concept such as love. The difficulty remains, however, that if love is not in policy, this gap might be filled with other policies about relationships between practitioners and children, such as over-prescriptive behaviour policies or over-restrictive policies in relation to touch. I know of ECEC settings where such policies exist, and these inevitably place restrictions on how practitioners are allowed to show love to children.

### **2.3.2 Early years qualifications and standards**

While the notion of love is barely present in policy, it has featured in some of the guidance materials associated with professional standards. I will firstly discuss the notion of professional standards, and then go on to explore the specific early years standards and associated guidance.

The Labour Government (1997-2010) in England established the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) to develop appropriate routes into the profession. The CWDC launched the Early Years Professional Status, a graduate-only route into work with young children. The notion of 'love' featured in the standards and guidance associated with this specifically Early Years Professional Status, with an acknowledgement that "a loving and stimulating environment can give young children confidence and enable them to flourish" (CWDC, 2007, p.2).

Each standard was followed by examples from practice. Under the standard about relationships with children, whereby practitioners are required to "establish fair, respectful, trusting, supportive and constructive relationships with children" (S25), the example offered mentioned love:

When we discussed his progress, I raised my concerns and this gave other colleagues a chance to talk about how sad this situation was for him but that he could not be allowed to hurt others and disrupt their play. So we decided we'd adopt a gentle but firm way to show we love him but not his behaviour. The member of staff – when possible his key worker – would take him aside after comforting the offended child/children and quietly explain. (CWDC, 2007, Example S25/1)

Similarly, under the standard about behaviour, which required practitioners to “demonstrate the positive values, attitudes and behaviour they expect from children” (S28), the example also mentioned love:

...one boy was becoming isolated in the class group, and the more isolated he became the more aggressively he behaved towards the other children. Following a discussion with staff, we decided to demonstrate how much we valued him by: first, ‘catching’ him being good and praising him for his efforts; second, choosing him as a friend or partner ourselves in games; and, third, showing him and the other children that he was equally loved and valued. (CWDC, 2007, Example S28/1)

In both examples, the leading practitioners involved offered their teams the opportunity to talk about their work with particular children. Through team discussions, they agreed that, when possible, members of staff, preferably the key person, would either talk to the child about their behaviour or praise their good behaviour, and in both cases, reassure them that they were loved. Thus, while the standards themselves did not mention love, the examples of how they should behave in practice made it clear that practitioners were expected to love children.

Aspiring Early Years Professionals, trained between 2007 and 2013, were required to work with these standards from the outset of their training. Thus they were taught, from the start, that love was appropriate in the context of their work. According to Huey-Ling, Gorrell and Silvern (2001), this is what some prospective teachers expect. This study of Taiwanese trainee teacher expectations found that they anticipated teaching with love, and expected to develop close relationships and emotional bonds with the children, built on mutual love. This aspect of loving relationships and of the mutual benefits to be gained by both adults and children is also emphasised by Shin (2010). who found that practitioners “enjoy themselves playing” (p.301). and Quan-McGimpsey, Kuczynski and Brophy (2011). who pointed to the mutually enjoyable aspect of experiences developed within intimate relationships between adults and children.

The Nutbrown (2012) independent review of Early Education and Childcare qualifications also noted the importance of including ‘love’ in the training. Nutbrown recommended that “all of those working in the early years, whatever their job title and role, must be carers as well as educators, providing the warmth and love children need to develop emotionally” (Nutbrown, 2012, 2.7). This position was echoed in the

government paper ‘More Great Childcare: Raising quality and giving parents more choice’ (DfE, 2013), which emphasised the need to place highly qualified staff with very young children, since “high quality early education and childcare, delivered with love and care, can have a powerful impact on young children” (DfE, 2013, p.13).

In 2013, the government introduced the new Early Years Teacher Status, to replace the Early Years Professional Status, which included a set of new professional standards (NCTL, 2013). In contrast to the previous ones, these standards made no mention of ‘love’.

Although the word love appeared in a small number of publicly produced or commissioned documents such as ‘Foundations for Quality’ (Nutbrown, 2012) and ‘More Great Childcare’ (DfE, 2013), it has not become a central part of the early years political discourse. The standards associated with the new Early Years Teacher Status (NCTL, 2013) required practitioners to:

Know and understand attachment theories, their significance and how effectively to promote secure attachments (NCTL, 2013, Standard 2.3)

Communicate effectively with children from birth to age five, listening and responding sensitively (NCTL, 2013, Standard 2.5)

Demonstrate an awareness of the physical, emotional, social, intellectual development and communication needs of babies and young children, and know how to adapt education and care to support children at different stages of development (NCTL, 2013, Standard 5.3)

There is an implication in these standards that love might feature within practice that meets these requirements to “promote secure attachments” (Standard 2.3), respond “sensitively” (Standard 2.5) to children and offer “support” (Standard 5.3) according to children’s needs (Standard 5.3). However, there is no explicit mention of love. Furthermore, there was an acknowledgement in the statutory framework for the early years (DfE, 2014) that

a child’s experiences between birth and age five have a major impact on their future life chances. A secure, safe and happy childhood is important in its own right. (DfE, 2014, p.5)

Despite these requirements to meet children's emotional needs, and an acknowledgement that childhood is a special time, there is no explicit expectation in policy documents that ECEC professionals should love the children they care for.

Prescribed professional standards might be viewed, I suggest, as a feature of what Dahlberg et al (2007) referred to as the 'modernist dream'. To me, professional standards represent official benchmarks and minimum requirements of acceptable practice which, I concur with Dahlberg et al (2007), may facilitate a culture of obedience. As Osgood (2010) argued, the "neo-liberal government discourse" (p.127) offered a more limited version of professionalism, with an emphasis on "publicly accountable approaches to assuring effectiveness, quality and hence professionalism" (Osgood, p.127). An example of this neo-liberal government discourse was the proposal in the paper 'More Great Childcare' (DfE, 2013) that "rigid staffing requirements" (p.19) be lessened, and that children/staff ratios be altered to allow more children to be cared for by every adult. Although the proposal was not followed through, it is possible that other government acknowledgements about the importance of love may recede into the background.

I also feel that this increased emphasis on quality and professionalisation, while offering some welcome assurances in relation to standards of practice, might also serve to detract attention from the importance of love, including warm relationships and a personal commitment to children and families. A practitioner might have all their paperwork up to date, well-written self-evaluations, a range of resources to stimulate children, and good communication with parents, for example, but lack the disposition to love some children in the way that they need to be loved. As some authors (Bowlby, 1980, 1988, Gerhardt, 2004, Read, 2010, Page, 2011, Elfer et al, 2012) and historical thinkers (Russell, 1926, Locke, referred to in Lawrence, 1970) have argued, I too hold that children need love in order to thrive, feel cherished, gain self-confidence, and make leaps in their learning and development. Accordingly, I believe that young children need practitioners who will love them.

This lack of love in the standards demonstrates how the public world of early years professional requirements has been in some way separated off from people's private worlds. Taggart (2011) claimed that there was a lack of attention to important qualities such as care and love. He suggested that love and care appeared to belong to

purely private, non-accountable domains, and seemed to have no place in professional early years practice with its emphasis on regulation and economic accountability.

The notion of love, I argue, does not fit in with such modernist and neo-liberal notions as quality and professionalism. In such a quality-driven, economically orientated world, love remains un-said in ECEC. However, while love is largely absent from policy documents, and rarely referred to in current writing about ECEC, there are some authors who have argued that it is important, and these will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **2.4 Conclusion to ‘love in policy’ section**

In this section I attempted to answer one of my research questions: What do policies say about love in the context of Early Childhood Education and Care? I found that love is barely mentioned in policies and only intermittently in professional standards and associated guidance for practitioners.

## **2.5 Conclusion to chapter**

In this chapter about references to love in ECEC I have explored the different meanings of love in ECEC and considered how researchers have used related concepts of care, attachment and emotional labour instead of love. I have reviewed the presence or not of love in policies and professional standards, suggesting possible reasons for this and implications. In the next chapter I consider research that refers to love, including the issues and dilemmas associated with it.

### **3 RESEARCH FOCUSING ON LOVE IN ECEC**

In this chapter I review the literature that considers the topic of love in the context of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). I discuss the importance of love in ECEC, why love matters and how it connects to ideas of professionalism. I then examine some of the frequently discussed issues and dilemmas related to love in ECEC, focusing firstly on parents and practitioners, then on love in familial and non-familial contexts, and finally on touch as an expression of love. This leads me on to explore the topic of appropriate support for ECEC practitioners in relation to love in the context of their work. In the final section I identify how the literature informed my methodological approach.

#### **3.1 Research findings about love in ECEC**

In this section I explore the research literature about love in the context of ECEC. If we take the view that practitioners should love children, I suggest it is important to consider in greater detail the following questions:

- What is love in the context of ECEC?
- Why does love in ECEC matter?
- How does loving children relate to professionalism?

I have presented the headings as questions rather than titles so as to capture the range of different emphases in the constructions of love in ECEC. There are different meanings of love, as well as different views about why it is important in professional contexts. There are also different ideas about the extent to which it forms part of the professional role.

##### **3.1.1 What is love in the context of ECEC?**

I have already addressed some aspects of love in ECEC in my discussions about the notions of care, attachments and emotional labour. I now turn to literature which directly addresses the notion of love.



In her narrative study of a primary teacher in a classroom, Goldstein (1998) emphasised the importance of relationships in work with young children. She argued that loving and caring encounters are about quality interactions between carers and those they care for. In work where love is called for, she showed that there can be no absolute principles to guide practitioners. 'Love' is an encounter between people, and always context-specific, "variable, situated, and unique" (p.246).

The importance of relationships is also emphasised by Grumet (1988) in her study about women and teaching. For Grumet, it is not enough for adults to know children well, they must also "share a world with the other people who love that child" (p.179). She also expressed her belief that children's capacity to receive and respond to a teacher's love relied on their wider experience of love.

References to love in the context of professional work appear in different contexts. Page found that love featured prominently in the narratives of her six parent-participants, and developed the concept of "professional love" (Page, 2010, 2011). This was to denote a style of love that was "in tune" (Page and Elfer, 2013, p.556) with the love parents offer their children, and at the same time posed no threat to the parent-child relationship. On the contrary, 'professional love' served to "support dialogue between carers and parents" (Page, 2011, p.11). For Page, 'professional love' stood for more of an intellectual than instinctive love. It derived out of a sense of what is right and natural, and, importantly, she suggested with Elfer (Page and Elfer, 2013), it emanated "from a position of being cared for" (p.557). Page and Elfer (2013) argued that ECEC practitioners need to have been well cared for themselves in order to be able to offer this 'professional love'. This 'professional love', therefore, called for practitioners who are not only "highly qualified" (Page and Elfer, 2013, p.557), but also "emotionally resilient".

This work with young children that sometimes involves love, then, is less about enacting duties carefully and attentively, and more about authentic feelings that emanate from the inner beings of 'emotionally resilient' people (Goldstein, 1998, Lynch, Baker and Lyons, 2009, Page, 2011). As Noddings (2007) proposed, "there are no recipes for caring" (p.223) since every encounter arises within a relationship between people, and is always new, situated and unique. The notion of 'professional

love' (Page, 2010, 2011), as I understand it, gives legitimacy to this personal, non-standardised aspect of work with young children.

It is local practice, entangled as it is in the material world (Lenz Taguchi, 2010) and drawing on culture (Marin and Kamberelis, 2013), that emerges as prominent in this literature. Love is enacted in the middle of things, given in very "concrete" (Noddings, 2007, p.224), human ways, in the context of real relationships. Page's notion of 'professional love', I argue, is a helpful one as expressed by the parents in her study. If widely adopted it would allow parents to talk about love with the people who care for their children. This research adopts a different approach to that adopted by Page, and explores love from the perspectives of practitioners in ECEC settings. Accordingly, I consider it important to discuss, firstly, why loving children matters, and, secondly, how loving children relates to notions of professionalism.

### **3.1.2 Why does loving children matter?**

The importance of love for children's healthy development is a particular emphasis in some studies. As discussed in Chapter two, Bowlby (1980) emphasised that children benefit from reliable and consistent close proximity to particular adults, and this formation of a bond between children and adults was akin to being in love with someone. Gerhardt (2004) stressed the importance of love based on her experience and knowledge as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist. She presented the case for love from a biological perspective, arguing that people's psychological make-up is, to a significant extent, shaped in relation to their formative experience of being loved, or not. Gerhardt demonstrated that there is a direct correlation between feeling loved by "particular others" (Bowlby, 1988, p.32) as young children and becoming emotionally balanced for life.

In an action research study about quality provision in children's centres, Manning-Morton (2006) argued that "children do not thrive if they do not also receive loving attention" (p.45). She pointed to the somatosensory system in children's brains, which is stimulated from birth through touch. Manning-Morton emphasised that young children internalise the way they are touched and held, and that "this becomes part of their sense of self" (p.45). Thus for Manning-Morton, loving young children

involves touching in the form of holding and hugging, and this is a theme that I return to later in this chapter.

Thus the importance of love from a developmental perspective is insisted on by Gerhardt (2004) and Manning-Morton (2006). Love, they argued, which is internalised in the physical body from an early age, pays dividends through life. I concur with these authors in respect of these views and hold that children's early experiences are critical to their healthy development.

### **3.1.3 How does loving children relate to professionalism?**

The topic of love in relation to issues of professionalism has received attention from researchers. Owen and Gillentine (2011), in their survey in four schools in Ohio about teachers' attitudes and practices in relation to touch, pointed to the need for early years practitioners to regain their confidence and trust in their "professional intuition" (p.866) and "establish loving, caring, nurturing environments" (p.866).

The notion of "professionalism from within" (Osgood, 2012, p.131), introduced briefly in Chapter two, incorporates the more subjective, personal features of work in the early years. Osgood found that practitioners do so much more than perform specified tasks. They also invest themselves fully in their work, and this involves their emotions too. Through her narrative study of practitioners in three nurseries, she demonstrated that this subjective commitment to caring and loving was more important to the practitioners in her sample than the neo-liberal requirements to perform to "externally set demands for competence" (p.133). Osgood (2010) conceived of the notion of 'professionalism from within' to accommodate people's subjective, "personal and collective investments" (p.126) in their work, which are not encapsulated in "externally set demands for competence" (p.126).

Osgood (2012) emphasised that ECEC professionals engage in an "emotionally demanding work environment" (p.147) and that this necessitates a supporting and collegial approach. People's private emotions are evoked in their work. At the same time, ECEC practitioners also inhabit a strictly professional domain, in which they abide by policies and adhere to procedures. Osgood's notion of 'professionalism from within' allows for intuitive and inner convictions to be explored and gain recognition

in professional contexts. Page's notion of "professional love" (2010, 2011) (see Section 2.5.1) may, I suggest, help to give legitimacy to these subjective features of the work and allow what Osgood refers to as "small acts of subversion" (p.126) to come out into the open, as features of professional work.

Taggart (2011) discussed ethics and emotional labour in the context of early years work, arguing that these private and public domains need not be separated and distinguished from each other in any hierarchical sense. He argued that although a disposition to care may be natural, in the sense that some people may be naturally 'good' with children, this disposition needs to be valued as part of the professional role, as it is in school teaching, nursing or ministry.

To conclude this section on how love relates to notions of professionalism, ECEC professionals engage in complex work that involves their inner, private emotions (Osgood, 2012), and at the same time their work is also public facing (Taggart, 2011). I find these useful considerations for my research about love in ECEC, whereby a concept such as love that is often associated with private spheres is considered in a public domain.

## **3.2 Issues and dilemmas**

In the section above I discussed love in ECEC contexts, why it matters, and how it relates to notions of professionalism. I now turn to the literature that emphasises some of these issues and dilemmas associated with loving children in ECEC. This section is organised under the following three headings:

- Parents and practitioners
- Love in familial and non-familial contexts
- Touch as an expression of love.

### **3.2.1 Parents and practitioners**

It is important, I suggest, to include a discussion about motherhood in this review of the literature, since the complexity and dilemmas mothers face in relation to leaving their children with other people contributes to the complexity of the role of ECEC practitioners.

In their study of mothers' childcare choices, Vincent and Ball (2001) found that some mothers search for affectionate and warm approaches, in loving and home-like environments, and open, non-business-like exchanges. Parents, they showed, may feel guilty about leaving their children in someone else's care, need to make compromises, settle for best-fit solutions, and adopt a pragmatic approach with reference to their family needs and local contexts.

Page's (2013b) life historical research also showed that the six mothers in her study faced difficult decisions, and these often involved compromise. The mothers wanted their children to be looked after in homely environments, by adults who would love them. This was seen as more important than choosing adults who gained a good rating from inspection bodies. Page found that the mothers in her study, when choosing childcare, regarded love as more important than education or cleanliness. Her participants informed her that, when things did not go as well as they might have, they sometimes ignored minor issues for the sake of maintaining good relationships with the childminders. Page concluded that love is a crucially important factor in childcare, and emphasised that "for too long the subject of love has been neglected" (p.8), and that this "serves to deny its existence" (p.8).

In an analysis of care and emotional labour in day nurseries, the feminist geographers Boyer, Reimer and Irvine (2012) expressed concern that, in a context in England where the number of full-day nursery places had nearly doubled in a decade, their explorations of the current literature still revealed some hesitation in respect of "non-familial care" (p.519), and a "vilification of collective childcare provision" (p.519). The practitioners in the five centres they studied in the South of England said there was an unwritten sense whereby "kin have certain rights – to tell a child they are loved ... for example – which non-kin do not share" (p.533).

Teacher and parent self-perceptions were also explored by Dalli (2007) who asked the mothers and nursery teachers of six children about their differing identities in respect of their different roles. She found that, while the teachers said they perceived the mothers as the prime care-givers, the mothers or other primary carers perceived themselves as vulnerable, losing control, and less powerful than their children's nursery teachers.

These issues about parents and practitioners in relation to love in ECEC present an intricate web of emotions, tensions, practical considerations and negotiations, all of which, I suggest, contribute to the complexity of working with young children in non-familial contexts. Some parents feel guilty when leaving their children in someone else's care (Vincent and Ball, 2001), yet want their children to be loved by other people (Page, 2013b). There is also a lingering, often un-spoken cultural distrust of out-of-home care (Boyer, Reimer and Irvine, 2012). This emotional work necessarily, I suggest, involves practitioners drawing on their inner resources, including their emotions. I acknowledge, with Osgood (2012), that this can be constructed as an empowering situation whereby practitioners can manage their emotions and apply them to their professional contexts.

### **3.2.2 Love in familial and non-familial contexts**

I introduce this section about love in familial and non-familial contexts with a further discussion about 'attachment' (see Section 2.3.1) and how it relates to the concept of 'love'. I referred earlier to the definition of love in Collins dictionary, where 'to love' was "to have a great attachment to and affection for" another (see Section 1.2). Bowlby's distinction between having "enduring attachments ... to particular others" (p.32) and displaying "episodic ... attachment behaviours" (p.32) is a useful one in this context. 'Episodic attachment behaviours', as I understand Bowlby's phrase, are not the same as love. Such behaviours represent children's intermittent attempts at achieving closeness with their important adults. Having 'enduring attachments to particular others', I suggest on the other hand, more closely resembles and involves love. The phrase evokes a closeness between two people achieved through reliable, consistent, warm exchanges over time. Since Bowlby was writing in an historical context in which most children were looked after principally by their mothers, it is important to re-interrogate Bowlby's writing from the current vantage point in England, in which children are more often, for varying amounts of time, cared for in non-familial contexts.

Bowlby's (1988) work emphasised the importance of the mother-child relationship. The examples he drew on to illustrate his expositions about attachment theory were largely drawn from mother and child behaviours and interactions. He also argued that "both parents" (p.12) provide a "secure base" (p.12) from which children can explore

the world beyond the home. This is not to say, however, that Bowlby believed that children could only form close attachments to their own biological parents. In the absence of the “mother-figure” (p.31), he wrote, “[the child] will make do with someone else, preferably someone whom he knows well” (p.31). Whilst children may display ‘episodic attachment behaviours’ to “a variety of individuals” (p.32) in order “to obtain/maintain a desired proximity” (p.31), they develop ‘enduring attachments’ to a select few “particular others” (p.32), and these could be in non-familial contexts.

The importance of young children forming secure attachments to one adult, preferably the mother, was also highlighted by Menzies Lyth (1982). Menzies Lyth was writing in a period when institutions, such as nurseries, were often viewed as a poor substitute for the home and, furthermore, were sometimes considered to “permanently impair [a child’s] capacity for forming attachments and meaningful relationships” (p.3). She made recommendations based on research in children’s hospital wards and emphasised the importance of mirroring the experience of the home in the institution, and for carers to work closely with families. For Menzies Lyth, young children need consistency of care, and “holding together by space as well as by attached people” (p.19), so that the outside world is mediated for them by “familiar caretakers” (p.19).

The emotional complexities involved in caring for children were exposed by Menzies Lyth (1982), who argued that there should be no expectation that nurses and other practitioners should be sufficiently skilled or resilient for this work, or, as she put it, “able for it” (p.17). This marked an early acknowledgement about the complexity of work with young children outside the home, and paved the way for more professional discussions about work in ECEC. There is now an understanding about the value of professional talk, especially in relation to the affective aspects of the role (Goouch and Powell, 2013, Page and Elfer, 2013).

In a study of one nursery, Page and Elfer (2013) also pointed to the difference between attachments in familial and non-familial contexts. They suggested that the approach in one context cannot be simply translated onto another context, and proposed that such a translation was likely to be “problematic” (p.10). Page and Elfer (2013) found that the practitioners in their study said they sometimes relied on their intuition or simply translated their own experiences of attachment into their nursery

contexts, and proposed, instead, that there should be a clear distinction between love experienced in the family and in ECEC settings.

The idea of professionals working with children as if they were members of their own family was a contrasting stance proposed by Noddings (2001). Noddings portrayed a context in which children were predominantly cared for by family members who love them, and emphasised the relational aspect of this affective work. She argued that people are “dependent on each other” (Noddings, 2007, p.225) and need love, and recommended that loving encounters become an integral part of the professional role. Loving encounters, she emphasised, involve the whole person, and adults need to consider how to respond to each child as if they were “a member of [their] ... inner circle” (Noddings, 2007, p.223).

Love in non-familial contexts, then, is constructed by some authors as problematic (Menzies Lyth, 1982, Page and Elfer, 2013), with highly skilled, emotionally resilient and loving staff needed for the work (Noddings, 2007).

### **3.2.3 Touch as an expression of love**

In the sections above I explored issues and dilemmas faced by practitioners and parents in relation to love in ECEC, and around whether familial love is appropriate in non-familial contexts. In this section I go on to look more closely at touch as an expression of love. The subject of touching young children has become associated with paedophilia, and sometimes seen as sexual, which, I would argue, is not generally the case. And yet ECEC experts (Manning-Morton, 2006, Owen and Gillentine, 2011) argue that it is important to touch children.

‘Touch’ has been the subject of close attention by educational researchers. It is constructed as confusing and complex (Piper and Smith, 2003). On the one hand it is argued that it is important for young children’s emotional development that they are touched (Gerhardt, 2004, Manning-Morton, 2006, Owen and Gillentine, 2011), and practitioners are aware of this (Powell and Goouch, 2012). On the other hand, physical contact between adults and children is constructed as dangerous (Piper and Smith, 2003, Sikes and Piper, 2010), and I elaborate on this below.



In their work on touch and young children in non-familial contexts, Piper and Smith (2003) proposed that touch takes on different meanings to different people, according to their experiences of it. They expressed concern that, if touch becomes too calculated and controlled, it loses some of its positive effects and risks becoming dangerously sterile, overly safe and sanitised. They added that restrictive policies, while established to protect adults and children, offer an impoverished experience for children, and recommended that centre guidelines be drawn up more flexibly and practitioners be offered opportunities to talk about fears and explore contradictions.

ECEC practitioners in England work within a wider cultural context of fear in which, according to Sikes and Piper (2010), adults are sometimes regarded with suspicion, as if they may be “sexual predators” (p.20) and children as sexual victims. Early years practitioners, suggested Sikes and Piper, may not always feel able to enter into loving exchanges with children that involve touch since, “for a professional adopting the status of *in loco parentis* is a dangerous thing to do” (p.22).

In their research on teachers’ perceptions in four schools in Ohio, USA, Owen and Gillentine (2011) highlighted the importance of touching children as a means of communicating love. Teachers in their study believed that children “need to be loved and cared for through the expression of touch” (p.866). The authors described cultural barriers that prevent this ethical approach, particularly fear and moral panic in relation to child abuse allegations, and pointed to a wide gap between what participants believe, namely that touch is important, and what they practise.

Powell and Gooch (2012) emphasised a professional conflict of interests in relation to safety in baby rooms. Participants in their Baby Room study stressed the importance of loving children in their care, whilst at the same time reporting that child protection concerns influenced their day-to-day approach with the children. Thus there were unwritten restrictions on the extent to which these practitioners felt they could be demonstrative in their love. Such cultural fears, I suggest, impose limits on professionals. In the context of the Baby Room research project, practitioners were unable to act fully in accordance with their beliefs about the importance of love. The research demonstrated that restrictions on what practitioners felt they could do, arising out of cultural concerns with child protection matters, inevitably had an impact

on the quality of love offered in ECEC settings. And, as I have argued, since children need love, this is not a desirable situation.

Teams must draw up appropriate safeguarding policies (Maisey, 2011), yet, as I have shown, policies can be over-restrictive. Over-defensive, over-restrictive policies in relation to touch may inhibit the intuitive side of people's professionalism and create a tension between what they consider privately, as ethical people, and what they are prescribed to do as public professionals. The issue of touch, then, is connected to the topic of love and yet adds complexity to it.

To conclude this section on issues and dilemmas associated with the love in ECEC, love from parents is different to love in professional contexts (Page and Elfer, 2013), and yet in some respects it needs to be the same (Noddings, 2007). Some professionals are better equipped to give this love in non-familial contexts (Menzies Lyth, 1982). Finally, the issue of touch is contentious. On the one hand it is important for healthy child development (Noddings, 2001, Gerhardt, 2004, Manning-Morton, 2006, Owen and Gillentine, 2011) and on the other it is constructed as dangerous (Piper and Smith, 2003, Sikes and Piper, 2010).

### **3.3 Support for ECEC practitioners in relation to love**

In the previous section I explored issues and dilemmas associated with the parent and practitioner relationship, the relationship between love in familial and non-familial contexts, and the appropriateness of touch as an expression of love in non-familial contexts. In this section I review the literature about how practitioners are supported in relation to these complex features of their work.

ECEC in England represents a complex scene in which “disparate discourses ... value and devalue the work of caring for young children” (Vincent et al, 2004, p.573). I suggested that there is a need, as proposed by Page and Elfer (2013), for a new awareness about the complexity of the work. It is possible that some practitioners, for example, may form attachments with some children, feel a sense of loss when children leave their care, be unable to talk freely about affective matters in the workplace, or be worried about touching children as a sign of love.

One form of support is to provide opportunities for practitioners to reflect on their own practice. Manning-Morton (2006) advocated this in a study of quality provision for birth to three-year-olds. She emphasised the importance of practitioners developing as mature, emotionally intelligent, self-aware adults, and “becom[ing] experts in themselves” (p.48). She recommended that practitioners receive high levels of support in order to meet day-to-day challenges, including instances when they may be rejected by children, and emphasised that work with very young children involves practitioners’ hearts as much as their minds.

Similarly, Osgood (2011) argued that practitioners need “improved support” (p.131) for this work. She suggested this from the point of view of mitigating the human cost of this “emotionally demanding work” (p.131). Osgood proposed that if early years practitioners were allowed to draw on their “life experience and wisdom” (p.130), as indicated within her concept of ‘professionalism from within’, they might develop an even “deeper-level appreciation for the work (i.e. professionalism)” (p.130). The complexity of the role was also emphasised by Harwood, Klopper, Osanyin and Vanderlee (2013). They found, in their international study across four countries, that love was very important in practitioners’ constructions about professionalism in ECEC, and proposed that more opportunities be established for participants to talk about the emotional aspects of their roles.

Page and Elfer noted that staff often adopted “a largely intuitive approach” (p.564) in their daily work, “drawing on personal experience rather than a body of theoretical knowledge” (p.564). They proposed that managers should facilitate opportunities for staff to talk about complex aspects of their work, and allow issues to be brought into the open. Managers, they proposed, should establish a climate in which it is acceptable for there to be no clear answers to questions, problems and issues may be raised, uncertainty can prevail, and practitioners are able to talk about their feelings and concerns. Page and Elfer pointed to the need for appropriate support for these complex features of “professional love” (Page 2010, 2011).

This emphasis on the need for reflective talk in ECEC was applied in research by Gooch and Powell (2013) who set up a project for baby room practitioners. This was in response to practitioners’ stated need for “specific development opportunities” (p.81), and their sense of feeling “poorly supported” (p.82) in their work with babies.

Goouch and Powell found that the baby room practitioners were very willing to engage in the project and learn from each other. These “critical spaces” (p.83) for talking and thinking helped the practitioners “to develop a sense of their own worth in their work and to develop a ‘voice’” (p.87). “Time for talk” (p.84) helped them to think about their practice and gain a better understanding about their work. The primary importance of this research was in exploring the value of creating spaces for “professional talk” (p.83) in the context of people’s work in ECEC. These opportunities for talk, according to Goouch and Powell, helped the participants in their research to interpret their experiences in the baby room, value particular aspects of their work, make links with their own life experiences, reflect, think about their practice, and consider other possibilities. “Talk through narrative constructions” (p.85), they found, was a powerful learning experience.

The complexity of the role of ECEC practitioners, then, is widely written about (Manning-Morton, 2006, Page, 2010, 2011, Page and Elfer, 2013, Osgood, 2011, Harwood et al, 2013, Goouch and Powell, 2013), as is the importance of loving children in ECEC contexts. However, all agree that this carries complexities, often unspoken and unacknowledged. Page (2010, 2011) found that there was a need, in her conceptualisation of ‘professional love’, for a professional language of love to be developed through which to explore this complex work. Osgood (2011) called for more space to be made for people to draw on their subjective experiences to enhance their professional practice. Goouch and Powell (2013) emphasised the value of talk.

While the main area of this research was on practitioners’ constructions of love in ECEC settings, it is also of interest to consider whether they found any value in the opportunities the research opened up for them to reflect on different aspects of their work, particularly as they related to the topic of love.

### **3.4 How the literature informed my research design**

In this two-part review of the literature I have explored how notions of love and care were applied by researchers, as well as by different historical thinkers. I critiqued what different researchers have said about love in ECEC, as well as about concepts closely associated with love, including ‘ethic of care’, attachment and ‘emotional labour’. I have critically reviewed what the policies in England say about love and

found very little mention of it. This review has shown that love in ECEC is a complex topic, for practitioners and parents, and that there is minimal reference to it in policy or research.

The complexity of work in ECEC informed my methodological decisions. The literature pointed to the need for a research design that would:

- Explore practitioners' constructions of love in ECEC because this has had very little previous attention in research
- Allow the participants wide scope to talk about the aspects of love that interest and concern them because
  - a) the topic itself is wide-ranging, and
  - b) I did not want the participants in my research to simply comment on my views
- Allow for the fact that practitioners' constructions of love in ECEC might change over time; therefore the first research encounter might prompt new thoughts that could be explored at the second encounter
- Explore the support, if any, that ECEC practitioners have had for loving children, both in their training and in their work contexts. and
- Explore the relationship between love in familial and non-familial contexts, since this has not previously been explored from the perspective of ECEC practitioners.

In this chapter I have provided a critical review of the literature as it relates to love in ECEC. In the next chapter I put forward the theories I applied to the research, and explore the literature related to these theoretical perspectives.

## 4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter I outline the theoretical framework that underpins this study. I focus in particular on the theories that helped me to develop my research in that they provided me with a conceptual framework for interpretation of data. Firstly, I outline my philosophical positioning with particular reference to positivism, pragmatism and postmodernism. I then explain how I drew on this positioning in making my theoretical and methodological choices. I critically present the theoretical framework that underpins this thesis, *social constructionism*, and explain how this emanated from my philosophical stance, related to the thesis, and helped me to frame the research. I go on to critically examine some of the literature that emphasised the primacy of the social and cultural elements of people's lives, stating that people draw on these resources to construct what they say. In the final section I consider how I apply this theoretical framework to this research.

### 4.1 Philosophical stances

In this section I outline my philosophical position. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) emphasised that “all qualitative researchers are philosophers” (p.33). I concur with this view since, as I experience the process of research, it necessarily involves philosophical thinking. As a researcher, for example, I take a stance and define my position. Additionally, my beliefs play an important part in shaping this research. Burr (2003) argued that “each of us, of necessity, must encounter the world from some perspective or other” (Burr, 2003, p.152). Accordingly, I acknowledge that my own perspectives are contained in this research, and that, by engaging in a process of defining my own personal stances and beliefs, I am also engaging in philosophical pursuits, and thus claim that philosophy feeds into research.

To some extent, I gained my philosophical stance unconsciously, simply by participating in the particular cultures I belonged to in South America, North America, Scotland and England, and by engaging with different social groups. I also acquired my philosophical stance more consciously, firstly by studying divinity and practical theology in Scotland when I was eighteen, as part of a first degree at a

Scottish university. Through this study I learned to ask questions about beliefs, and consider how they are translated into practices and expressed through language.

Secondly, over a decade later, and as a mature student in London, I studied philosophy as a discrete subject within a Primary and Early Years Teacher Training course. I took the subject further as a part time postgraduate student on a Master's programme entitled 'Literature, Representation and Modernity'. Through my study of literature I considered the influence of culture on how things are represented. Importantly, I learned to detect the individual, human, interpretivist element of all that is produced, including scientific research. Drawing on the words of my tutor, Wheeler (1999), I came to believe that everything people say and produce always "belonged to the culture of which they are a part" (p.136).

The philosophical stance I developed through my life and learning led me to be more comfortable with doubt than certainty, questions than answers, heterogeneity than homogeneity, diverse perspectives than single claims to truth. Accordingly, I draw on pragmatism more than positivism to develop this thesis. In the sections below I refer, in turn, to the philosophies of Kant (1724-1804), Russell (1912) and Rorty (1991) to explore these positions in more depth. I then discuss the notion of postmodernism and argue how this helped me to develop my overarching theoretical perspective.

#### **4.1.1 On positivism**

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) emphasised that all knowledge is gained through experience. According to Hamlyn (1970), Kant argued that there was a "permanent substance" (p.265) to be found in things, and that objects had their own "unity" (p.200) and "identity" (p.200). This could not be gleaned through reason, but only through people's experiences in the world. Kant downplayed the primacy of reason, and mistrusted metaphysical ideas in favour of grounded knowledge, based on people's understanding about events and things. Kant also developed the principle of universal causality (p.269), whereby every event has a cause. This principle could not be applied as a result of any belief, but *acquired* as a result of "the constant conjunction of the events in [people's] experience" (p.266). These principles (cause and effect, the primacy of epistemological knowledge over metaphysical beliefs, and

objects as having a permanent substance), although not at that time associated with positivism, nevertheless paved the way for it.

The notion of ‘positivism’ was first conceived of by August Comte (1798-1857). From a positivist perspective, Comte argued, human reason was able to “grasp the working of the world” (Halfpenny, 1982, p.16). According to Halfpenny, positivism went through a series of iterations as it developed through history; logical positivism was one such iteration in the 1920s and 1930s whereby empirical materials were converted into knowledge through a process of logical analysis. A century later, positivist perspectives continued to emphasise the importance of investigating “observable phenomena” (Bullock and Stallybrass, 1977, p.488) to arrive at true knowledge.

Positivism is also akin to rationalism. Rationalists, as Gergen (1999) wrote, are scholars or experts who are confident in their efforts to “secure ‘the last and only word’” (p.58). Positivism, like rationalism, points to a preference for naming and grouping things, ordering events, acknowledging that there is certainty in things and establishing firm structures.

#### **4.1.2 On pragmatism**

In the section above I defined the notion of positivism, which I resist in this thesis because it does not rest well with my philosophical stance. My experience of living in the world and my study of philosophy have led me to believe that nothing is certain in this world, things change, the unexpected occurs, life happens in an unplanned way, definitions do not hold for all time. Accordingly, I now turn to some critiques of positivism and put forward the notion of pragmatism.

The philosopher Russell (1912) argued against the positivist yearning for knowledge. Rorty (1991), too, battled against any position that neglected “the fragile and transitory” (p.34). Richardson and St Pierre (2008), in their writings about research, stated their belief that “having a partial, local and historical knowledge is still knowing” (p.476), and that “there is always more to know” (p.479).

Russell (2012) declared that his aim as a philosopher was:



... to keep alive that speculative interest in the universe which is apt to be killed by confining ourselves to definitely ascertainable knowledge. (Russell, 1912, p.242)

He emphasised the importance of remaining open to many possibilities and accepting doubt. Such dispositions, he said, free people from “the tyranny of custom” (p.243). Rorty (1991) described positivistic arguments as “just so many power plays” (p.33). He drew on the philosophical works of Heidegger (1889-1976) to emphasise “the fragility and riskiness of any human project” (p.34), and wrote that

Only when we escape from the verificationist impulse to ask “How can we tell a right answer when we hear one?” are we asking questions which Heidegger thinks worth asking. (Rorty, 1991, p.44)

Pragmatism, then, does not seek to verify things but only to acknowledge the human, transitory nature of all that is and occurs. I am drawn to this position, and find it particularly useful in this research that attends to what different people say about love in the context of their work in ECEC. Pragmatism as a philosophical framework accords with my emphasis that what people say may change at each re-telling or over time, and cannot be verified. In other words, there is no need to judge what people say as right or wrong, or to seek to correlate it with their practice, or how things happen.

While pragmatism may have synergies with relativism as a philosophical stance, particularly with its emphasis on the instability and uncertainty of everything, it is also very different. Whereas the relativist philosopher is less interested in truth or what is right *per se*, but more in what is true or right for the individual (Lacey, 1996), the pragmatist acknowledges that there *is* an external, real world to be dealt with, and is interested, instead, in “what works” (Lacey, 1996, p.266) for particular communities or groups of people.

For the pragmatist, the world out there is not a once-and-for-all given, but is, rather, shaped by the people who perceive it and act in it, in specific contexts and circumstances. The pragmatist has given up “the neurotic Cartesian quest for certainty” (Rorty, 1982, p.161), lost hope in the idea of “permanence” (Rorty, 1982, p.166), and ceased attempts to “[get] things right” (p.166) or to arrive at a general rule for, or what makes, something good. The pragmatist acknowledges that “there are no

methods for knowing *when* one has reached the truth” (p.166) (Rorty’s emphasis), and that there are only “transitory human projects” (p.166) in a complex world.

For the pragmatist, people live in a world built up over time by the communities to which they belong. As Rorty (1982), wrote:

Our identification with our community – our society, our political tradition, our intellectual heritage – is heightened when we see this community as ours rather than nature’s, shaped rather than found, one among many which men have made. (Rorty, 1982, p.166)

This is a pivotal statement in the context of this research since it emphasises the contextual nature of everything that is produced. People construct their knowledge and ideas drawing on the cultural and social resources at their disposal. This serves as a reminder that what people say in this research represents their construction of events, or what they make of love in ECEC. As a pragmatic researcher, in contrast to a more positivist one, I do not set out to discover once-and-for-all truths, but instead to shed light on situated, context-specific accounts about people’s lives, and capture “ever-changing, ambiguous, constructed realities” (Oliver, Nesbit and Kelly, 2013, p.12).

Rorty (1982) points to some of the criticisms of pragmatism, including that it is “frivolous” (p.172), and has too many “contingent starting points” (p.173). In defence of pragmatism, however, I celebrate its practical, worldly stance. Unlike Platonic thinkers who strive to “escape from conversation to something atemporal which lies in the background” (Rorty, 1982, p.174), or prefer to engage in theoretical conversations, pragmatists acknowledge their situated-ness in the world. From their worldly stance, they accept the complexity, contingency and impermanence of all worldly matters. As an empirical researcher, out in the world, and from this pragmatic standpoint, I accept that what is constructed in this research will contain contradictions, be difficult to unravel, and be contingent on other things.

### **4.1.3 On postmodernism**

In the section above I sketched out a definition of pragmatism with particular reference to Rorty and justified my own position. In this section I consider the notion

of postmodernism, and how it connects to pragmatism and this thesis. In postmodernism, as Gergen (1991) defined the notion, there is no certainty or predictability about things, and, instead “the centre fails to hold” (p.7). Gergen suggested that, in postmodernism, everything people talk about points more to their perspectives than to anything substantial:

In the postmodern world we become increasingly aware that the objects about which we speak are not so much “in the world” as they are products of perspective. (Gergen, 1998, p.7)

The world is unstable and open to reconstruction. For me, in the context of this thesis, this serves to remind me that the participants’ constructions of love in ECEC will represent their different perspectives, and that these perspectives may change or be given different emphases in the future or in different conversational contexts. In a postmodern world, beliefs do not necessarily hold and ideas do not correspond to things. As Gergen (1991) wrote:

Under postmodern conditions, persons exist in a continuous construction and reconstruction; it is a world where anything goes that can be negotiated. (p.7)

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) located the postmodern research period as emerging in the early 1990s, and defined it as shaped “by doubt, by a refusal to privilege any method or theory” (p.3). Postmodern researchers, they suggested, sought new criteria for evaluating their research. Rather than applying criteria such as “reason or truth” (p.15), they looked for such things as “emotionality, personal responsibility, an ethic of caring ... and dialogues with subjects” (p.15).

Deleuze and Guattari (1994) complemented this postmodern stance. For these authors, concepts and ideas have no correlation with what happens or how things are. Indeed, Foucault (1972) challenged the notion that there is anything beyond language, and, as Rorty (1986) wrote in his critique of Foucault’s theories, he believed that “we only know the world and ourselves under a description” (p.48). Talk, then, does not refer to real things (Gergen, 1999). Instead, it is how people communicate with others in their communities (Rorty, 1991), construct stories (Burr, 2003), and make meaning (Bochner, 2014). Language grounds or locates people within particular socio-cultural environments, and constructs new and impermanent realities. I concur with Rorty

(1982, 1986) who argues that language evolves with reference to people's needs and desire to express themselves, and is developed out of people's cultural and social circumstances. Language, then, like culture, which, as Williams (1976) elaborated, comes from the Latin word *cultura*, and originally referred to a process of tending crops or animals, grows slowly.

Deleuze and Guattari (1994) proposed that thinking is a form of experimentation, allowing new things to take shape. They wrote that things happen "as a result of contingency rather than necessity ... of becoming rather than history ... of a grace rather than a nature" (p.97). In other words, these authors made space for mystery and creativity, rather than finding an explanation for everything. In pragmatism, too, there is no certainty in the world, or any script for people to follow; instead there is scope to be creative, and for "acts which let new sorts of being be" (Rorty, 1991, p.46). For the pragmatist, such a postmodern world is not only fragile, risky and unpredictable, but also full of possibilities. As Deleuze and Guattari (1994) and Rorty (1991) suggested, things come into being and cannot always be predicted, they are born, mysteriously, and may not have been written in any script. For me, in the context of this thesis, this means that I remain open to what different people might say about love in ECEC that I may not have expected.

## **4.2 Philosophical stances and representation of research**

In the section above I put forward my philosophical stance. I now go on to discuss how my philosophical positioning influenced the research choices I made. The data I sought in this research was linguistic. I captured what people said. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) pointed out that experience in the world always represents "more than we can know and represent" (p.39). Accordingly, I am conscious that the research participants and I might, in other contexts and at other times, have said or written things differently, chosen other features to highlight, given more or less emphasis to parts of our interviews or reports, or disclosed different information. As Foucault (1972) wrote, speech acts do not necessarily represent what took place, but only "what occurred by the very fact that the statement was made, and precisely this statement (and no other) in specific circumstances" (p.93). I acknowledge that the

participants and I drew on our respective social and cultural resources in the constructions of love in ECEC.

Richardson (1990) said she believed that there is nothing in the world, not even a piece of writing, that can fully convey the aspects of life that it sets out to represent. Similarly, Denzin (2010) suggested that “reality in its complexities can never be fully captured” (p.423). Sikes and Gale (2006), in a similar vein, noted that there are no “techniques” (p.14) for relating aspects of life. People’s lives are enacted in local, real, community, embodied contexts, and are always “in flow and ... messy” (Plummer 2001, p.7). Lives are complex (Plummer, 2001), and, as suggested by Richardson (1990), Denzin (2010) and Sikes and Gale (2006), have no single or direct correlation in the spoken or written word.

Bochner (2014), in his fictional dialogue based on his past work with a therapist, affirmed these stances. In his reconstructed conversation with his therapist Milton, he discussed language and whether it pointed to what really was out there. What we say about the past, Bochner came to realise through his conversation, is “untrustworthy” (p.308), and there are “gaps between experience and expression” (p.309). In the context of this thesis, this serves as a reminder that what people may say about love in ECEC may not match what they do, or correlate with the quality of loving relationships in their settings. As Bochner (2014) wrote, “language is deficient. It can only scratch the surface of an experience” (p.309). Since, he argued, we only have the stories people tell about events in the past, there is perhaps no reality beyond how people re-tell things. As Bochner said, “stories are constructed” (p.311).

My methodological approach was driven by the perspectives outlined above. The non-positivist, pragmatist, postmodern research is open to what might become, and accepts that what people say in their research interviews is likely to be complex, contain contradictions, be difficult to hone down to key points. Nevertheless, interviews, along with other methods such as diaries or focus groups, are a good way to access other people’s constructions on any topic, even if these are only their temporary, contextual interpretations.

### 4.3 Social constructionism

In the sections above I defined my philosophical positioning and explained how this informed my approach to this research. In this section I discuss my theoretical framework of social constructionism. Social constructionism, I argue, sits within the philosophical positions of pragmatism and postmodernism, and is the theoretical framework that I found most helpful in developing this thesis. According to Burr (2003), social constructionism is built on the premise that meaning is constructed, not something that is fixed. It is open to different interpretations depending on how messages are conveyed and by whom, and also on who receives them. Meaning “is fluid, volatile and always open to change through the medium of social interaction” (Burr, 2003, p.44).

Social constructionism focuses on what people say and how they communicate with each other, and emphasises that people draw on social resources to construct meaning.

A lot of the things we take for granted as given, fixed and immutable, whether in ourselves or the phenomena we experience, can upon inspection be found to be socially derived and socially maintained. (Burr, 2003, p.44)

Thus, within a social constructionist framework, meanings change, are understood differently in different contexts and by different people, and are derived from social resources. Meanings, therefore, cannot be fixed or conclusive.

Gergen (1999) emphasised the need for researchers to adopt a questioning stance and to welcome doubt. He stressed that people construct many different meanings, and that, by accepting one meaning as definitive, or by holding firm to a particular interpretation, other possibilities are inevitably discarded. He wrote:

As we presume the reality and truth of our beliefs, so do we trample on the beliefs of others. (Gergen, 1999, p.17)

From a social constructionist perspective, then, I acknowledge that there are multiple possibilities to be considered, where people draw on their experiences of being in the world to construct meaning. This is not to say that a social constructionist framework adopts a deterministic stance, such that people are indelibly influenced or shaped by

their past experiences. There is no *inevitability* within a social constructionist framework. So, although people *draw* on their social and cultural resources, they are not *determined* by them.

Drawing on Gergen (1999) and Burr (2003), I highlight the features of social constructionism as a theoretical framework that I found particularly useful in developing my methodological approach and analysis of the data, and which I will elaborate on in the ensuing paragraphs. Firstly, researchers cannot “stand back from their own humanity” (Burr, 2003, p.151). Indeed, their personal and political values, histories and perspectives inform their research. Secondly, from a social constructionist perspective, respondents construct versions of themselves, drawing on their social and cultural resources to do so. Thirdly, meaning is always subject to change “through the medium of social interaction” (Burr, 2003, p.44). Fourthly, “language is not a picture of the real” (Gergen, 1999, p.226), and it is important to acknowledge that there will be different constructions on any topic. Finally, people’s accounts are not only how they construct events, but events in themselves.

Accordingly, what people say and write, or the linguistic and textual data they produce, is constructed, draws on social resources, is variously interpreted, and always in flux. Words and concepts such as ‘facts’ and ‘objectivity’ are therefore inappropriate within a social constructionist framework. This is not to say that social constructionist research cannot be justified in the academy, but to emphasise the pressing need for it to be systematic, “soundly argued” (Burr, 2003, p.159), with in-depth information about all research steps taken (p.159), and, as recommended by Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont (2003), maintaining “methodological vigilance” (p.138).

A social constructionist framework is suitable for research about people. In accordance with this theoretical framework, then, I do not develop and produce this thesis as an avatar, with no feelings, but as a living person in the world. Unlike a scientific paper in which “the findings reported are objective and uncontaminated by the heart” (Sandelowski, 1994, p.53), I acknowledge that I am unable to “stand back from my own humanity” (Burr, 2003, p.151), and that what I present is constructed with reference to my social and cultural resources. I adopt Sikes’s (1997) position in

relation to her own research, and “take full responsibility for how I have re-presented and re-interpreted what I was told” (p.136).

A social constructionist framework also points to a particular kind of relationship between researchers and their respondents, and narrative research, as I argue in Chapter five, is an appropriate methodology within this. As Chase (2008) pointed out, in narrative research researchers strive to transform “the interviewee-interviewer relationship into one of narrator and listener” (p.423). From a social constructionist perspective, the research encounters themselves also become part of the study. There is therefore a need to be aware of how the participants draw on their social and cultural resources to construct their interviews, and that what they say is constructed for the person who listens to them, which, in this case, will be me, the researcher.

Having defined social constructionism and offered a rationale for my use of it in this research, I will now consider some of the problems associated with the theoretical framework that I needed to be aware of.

#### **4.3.1 Problems with social constructionism**

As I showed in the preceding sections, some authors (Richardson, 1990, Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, Denzin, 2010, Sikes and Gale, 2006, Bochner, 2014) have argued that words do not correspond to actual events or things in the material world. Barad (2003), too, argued that words cannot be “tethered” (p.881) to anything real. Similarly, St Pierre (2013) wrote that, since there is no “reality out there to be found out” (p.649), language cannot represent anything accurately. If these positions are adopted, then it should also be acknowledged that there is instability and impermanence to verbal accounts, and all there is to analyse are what other people present and say, drawing on their social and cultural resources.

In some ways, this may also be a troubling state of affairs for researchers, and leads me to question how situations such as poverty, injustice or abuse may ever be addressed. People talk about poverty, for example, from their diverse perspectives. When some people say they are too poor to afford certain things, therefore, they may not mean ‘poor’ in the same way as others understand the term. They may, in fact, be materially quite well off. Accordingly, my social constructionist framework leads me



to wonder what may be done about anything at all, if all there is are the things people say and the meanings they exchange. I am also forced to consider where and precisely what the object of study is so that solutions can be identified and closely targeted. This is a problem for researchers who strive to get to the bottom of things in order to understand them and propose solutions that are well matched to the issues at hand. However, even though Gergen (1999) contended that “we should not put our trust in the fluctuating opinions of the crowds” (p.220), for if we do, how can we make any “rightful claims to knowledge?” (p.220), as I have stated earlier, I still hold that interviews are the best way to access people’s constructions of love in ECEC, and defend this position in the ensuing methodology chapter.

Another issue to be aware of with social constructionism, particularly in relation to the love in ECEC, is the use of the word love itself. As discussed in the introduction, the word love has many meanings. The question of whether the word could ever adequately convey the complexity of a concept such as love, including the constant changes and gradations of the state of loving or being loved in different people and at different stages of their lives, was put forward by Gergen (1999). I concur that the word is indeed complex and contains disparate meanings. However, I chose not to avoid the topic simply because it was complex. I strongly believed that the topic merited research since, according to Page (2011), parents talked about the importance of love in ECEC, and yet, as I have shown, there is minimal reference to it in current research literature or national policies.

In order to address these issues, I maintain an acute awareness that the participants will draw on their social and cultural resources to construct what they say about love. I am also aware that what they say might or might not be associated with one of the definitions (see Chapter one) or historical understandings (see Chapter two) of the word.

#### **4.4 Social, cultural and environmental resources that people draw on**

As stated above, social constructionism emphasises the importance of social and cultural contexts for how meaning is made. Burr (2003) explained that a social constructionist position accepts “the possibility of many different realities constructed within different historical and cultural contexts” (p.81). Accordingly, in this thesis, I

recognised that the participants would draw on their experiences in life, including, for example, the sorts of training they underwent, the cultures in their current workplaces, or the positions they held in the context of ECEC in their constructions of love.

In the following sections I highlight different theoretical perspectives that explore the connections between people's experiences in the world and how they construct what they say. I conceive of a continuum with determinism at one end and agency, or autonomy, at the other. This is not to suggest that I am locating any author at either extreme on the continuum, but rather that I am using the notion of determinism as one to resist, and point instead to my preference for agency and autonomy. According to Goldthorpe (2000), the notion of determinism was first put forward by August Comte (1798-1857), and developed by Emile Durkheim (1858-1917). Determinism, as conceived and developed by these thinkers, stood for all that was the antithesis of individual human action and free will.

In the 1940s and 1950s this stark position of determinism was softened, so that

... rather than causes being seen as necessitating their effects, they might be regarded simply as raising the probability of their occurrence. (Goldthorpe, 2000, p.137)

This position, according to Goldthorpe (2000), is one that most sociologists currently subscribe to. So, rather than seeing events and circumstances as directly causing particular effects, and since the world is so full of complexities, deterministic notions such as 'cause and effect' have been replaced by the idea of probable associations (Goldthorpe, p.138).

Accordingly, my conceptualisation of a continuum with determinism at one end, and agency or autonomy at the other, serves only to point to theoretical, rather than actual, extremes. The literature cited in the ensuing two sub-sections is more nuanced, concerned with associations rather than direct correlations. In the first section, then, and with this proviso, I critically explore the view whereby people are shaped or influenced to an extent by their social and cultural surroundings. In the second section I explore the view whereby people are more inclined to *draw on* their social and cultural resources and have more free will and autonomy to overcome their circumstances as necessary.

#### **4.4.1 People are shaped or influenced by their social and cultural surroundings**

It is important to reiterate that I do not classify any of the authors referred to in this section (Freire and Donaldo, 1987, Bronfenbrenner, 1971, 1979, Bruner, 1990, Lenz Taguchi, 2009) as determinist in their thinking. They simply give a stronger voice to the power of culture and environment in shaping and influencing how people come to know the world and talk about things.

In considering the importance of the environment in children's development, Bronfenbrenner (1971, 1979) argued that children are influenced by the different environments they inhabit, beginning with the home, then widening to include other trusted people, perhaps in a nursery context, and then widening further to include people connected to them in a more distant sense, including broader national contexts. He argued that "the family is not the only possible agent of upbringing" (1971, p.2), and that "the outside world also has major impact, as the child becomes exposed to a succession of persons, groups, and institutions" (p.2). Wider contexts were important, for Bronfenbrenner, but rather than being a source that people draw on, they shape and influence them.

Bruner (1990) also wrote about the importance of cultural influences on how people act and make meaning in the world. He claimed that "the values underlying a way of life ... become incorporated in one's self-identity" (p.29). For Bruner, human culture is powerful, quite firmly embedded in people's beliefs and patterns of life and not very "malleable" (p.23). He proposed that habits have more to do with culture than with physical need or reason, and locate a person in a culture. So, for Bruner too, culture becomes "firmly embedded" in people's lives.

Bruner (1990) referred to this cultural learning as "folk psychology" (p.30), whereby people acquire their cultural expectations from the canon of their culture. This cultural canon, then, is less a resource to draw on, and more something that is inevitably acquired. In "folk psychology" Bruner argued that people expect and accept a set of customary behaviours and outcomes, and that they learn in and through the physical world in which they act. As Bruner argued:

We learn our culture's folk psychology early, learn it as we learn to use the very language we acquire and to conduct the interpersonal transactions required in communal life. (Bruner, 1990, p.35)

Freire (Freire and Donaldo, 1987) wrote that the environment in which he grew up, in Recife, Brazil, gave shape to his emerging being. His surroundings contained his culture, in that "the texts, the words, the letters of that context were incarnated in a series of things, objects and signs" (p.30). Freire's perceptions of the world around him, then, gave him his cultural heritage and fed into the person he grew up to be. His surroundings shaped him, inevitably and unknowingly. This accords with Lenz Taguchi's (2010) proposition that people's surroundings give shape to their learning. From a deterministic perspective, the interpretation of this is that the very objects that surround people, their physical environment, the language they communicate in, are in some way perpetuated through them. As Lenz Taguchi (2009) proposed, people are located "in the middle of things" (p.19), "entangled" (p.20) within all that grows in their culture.

From these perspectives, then, ways of constructing the world and ideas are learned, become quite firmly incorporated or embedded in people from an early stage, and are not easily shaken off. In the section below I consider perspectives that lie further along the continuum towards the end where people have autonomy and agency, and where their life experiences do not necessarily determine their future constructions or actions. At these places on the continuum, people may break away from particular patterns of behaviour, see things differently, change course and establish new patterns for living.

#### **4.4.2 People draw on their social and cultural resources**

Lave and Wenger (1991) argued that learning cannot be seen as distinct from the contexts within which it emanates, but is, rather, "an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice" (p.31). The authors wrote about the importance of informal learning opportunities in which people learn from their physical participation, or action in a range of world contexts, and argued that there can be no "dichotomies between cerebral and embodied activity, between contemplation and involvement, between abstraction and experience" (Lave and Wenger 1991. p.52). People learn

bodily, through their involvement in the world. For Lave and Wenger, the physical environment is implicated in the learning process, and it is people's very involvement in the world that leads to learning. Learning involves "the whole person acting in the world" (Lave and Wenger 1991, p.49). What is different here to the views put forward in the preceding section is that the person, as the actor in the world, has more agency and autonomy.

Bourdieu (1993) said that people *practise* their culture, thereby suggesting some agency in what they choose to do. Their dispositions and actions are "enacted in structurally marked practices" (p.70), the practices that punctuate their lives and make them meaningful. Bourdieu (1991) used the word 'habitus' to refer to "a set of dispositions which incline agents to act and react in certain ways" (p.12). These dispositions, or innate beliefs, suggested Bourdieu, lie at the heart of people's actions, are known unconsciously, and are reliable, enduring, and regular. For Bourdieu, then, in contrast to the position whereby people are *shaped* or *influenced* by their social and cultural surroundings, people are *inclined* to act in particular ways. How they choose to act, however, is not inevitable.

Bourdieu's notion of habitus refers to learning that is durable and ingrained on the body. For Bourdieu (1997), the habitus is the site of all the unconscious learning, including emotional, intellectual, practical and physical learning, that make up our "esprit de corps" (p.145), or bodily spirit. The body learns, proposed Bourdieu, by exposure to the world. In the world, the body might face dangers, physical risk or emotional upheavals, for example. The body is therefore "obliged to take the world seriously" (p.141). For Bourdieu, the body and emotions are as one, and "nothing is more serious than emotion, which touches the depth of [people's] organic being" (p.141). From these perspectives, then, people learn and acquire durable habits and dispositions that may incline them to act in particular ways.

Thus Bourdieu developed the notion of "corporeal knowledge" (1997, p.135). 'Corporeal knowledge' is unconsciously acquired through practical, embodied situations. It is not the same as conscious knowledge, intellectual understanding or scholarly activity, for example, but rather is gained through people's bodily presence and active engagement in specific physical and social spaces. Individuals come to comprehend the world through their bodies. For Bourdieu, "we learn bodily" (p.141).

Bodily senses comprehend, interpret and navigate a way for their embodied subjects as they act out their lives in particular social and physical spaces.

This is relevant to the topic, since children learn about love through their physical experiences of being loved (Gerhardt, 2004), and love is often expressed in physical ways with young children. As a researcher, too, I acknowledge that what the participants say may enter my corporeal being in a very physical sense. As Kress (2003) pointed out, “the very materiality of the voice” (p.172) can produce strong feelings. Abram (1997), too, argued that there was a connection between language and our physical beings, and wrote that “human language arises from the perceptual interplay between the body and the world” (p.82). This is in tune with Deleuze and Guattari’s (1988) notion that we are “a molecular population” (p.345). All our movements and feelings occur in the material, physical world. This is important in this research, I argue, since the participants draw on their cultural and social resources, embedded in the material world, to construct what they say about love.

The perspectives put forward in this section align with social constructionism. As I showed in my critique of social constructionism, people may select from the resources they have available to construct meaning. So, for example, if there are no good models of loving relationships in their own home, then people may draw on what they observe or experience outside the home, including other families, media, stories or films.

#### **4.4.3 Conclusion to section about social cultural and environmental resources that people draw on**

In this section I have considered perspectives on different positions on the determinism-agency continuum. At one end, people *are shaped by* the social and cultural conditions to which they have been exposed, and at the other they have agency and *draw on* their social and cultural resources to construct their lives and the things they say. For the purposes of this thesis, and from a social-constructionist perspective, I find it more useful to position myself towards the agency end of the continuum. From this perspective, I acknowledge that the participants will draw on different social and cultural resources to construct what they say to me about love in ECEC, rather than be shaped or influenced by the conditions to which they were

exposed. In the next section I outline how I apply the theoretical framework put forward in this chapter to my methodological choices.

#### **4.5 How I apply these theoretical frameworks to the research**

Within a social constructionist framework, I acknowledge that the participants' constructions of love in ECEC will not necessarily reflect what might be observed. Instead, the participants will draw on their social and cultural resources to construct their narratives. Further, I also acknowledge that it is I who will set the topic for discussion, ask the questions, lead the interviews, and thereby shape the ensuing constructions about love in ECEC. My own positioning, namely that love is important in ECEC, will inevitably come through, and the constructions will be made jointly. It is also I who will then go on to analyse these constructions. Throughout this process, I will necessarily draw on my own social and cultural resources to make meaning from the interviews. In this context, and in an attempt to be faithful to what the participants choose to say, therefore, I will carry out a close study of their interview transcripts, and refer repeatedly to the participants' own words in my analytical chapter. I will offer reasons for my choice of themes and emphases, and back up my interpretations with relevant sections of the transcripts.

There is no escaping this intricate web of interconnections, and indeed it is this feature that makes such qualitative approaches so complex and interesting. The participants and I will construct something new, together, that will lead to unique insights, which may never have previously been constructed. While on the one hand I emphasise that these constructions are entirely subjective, I also believe that they have value beyond the confines of this study. Subject to close analysis, as these constructions will be, they are likely to reveal insights about what different people make of the topic of love in ECEC.

Thus the philosophical stances I adopt, and the theoretical framework I apply, help me to shape this research and back up the choices I make. My philosophical beliefs and theoretical framework, then, are the essential drivers behind the scenes, without which I would struggle to develop a meaningful and coherent piece from different people's constructions of love in ECEC.

## 4.6 Conclusion to theoretical framework

As I have demonstrated, this research draws on a range of philosophical works. The theories I have highlighted above I found on my “citation trail” (St Pierre 2011, p.620). One reading led to another, then another, on a sort of spiral-shaped reading pathway. As I delved into some new texts I re-encountered other familiar authors and re-visited ideas presented from different perspectives. I felt a sense of belonging to an “assemblage” (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, p.323), or group of thinkers.

In this chapter I put forward my theoretical framework for this thesis, one that resists *positivism* and leans on *pragmatism* and *postmodernism*, and that applies *social constructionism* as its foundation. I emphasised that what people say are constructions that do not necessarily relate to what happened or how things are. These constructions are based on people’s different perspectives, and draw on their social and cultural resources. Finally, I outlined how I apply these theoretical perspectives to the research. In the next chapter I outline my methodological choices, offering a rationale for developing the research as I did.



## 5 METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I set out my research design and offer a rationale for my methodological choices. In the first section I describe the research process as a whole and introduce the slow, recursive approach I adopted and that I conceptualised as a spiral-patterned process. In the remaining sections I talk about the people involved in the research, how the research was conducted, the research activities I engaged in, the transcription and analytical processes, the use of poetry in this thesis, the ethical considerations, questions of validity and the key limitations of the choices I made.

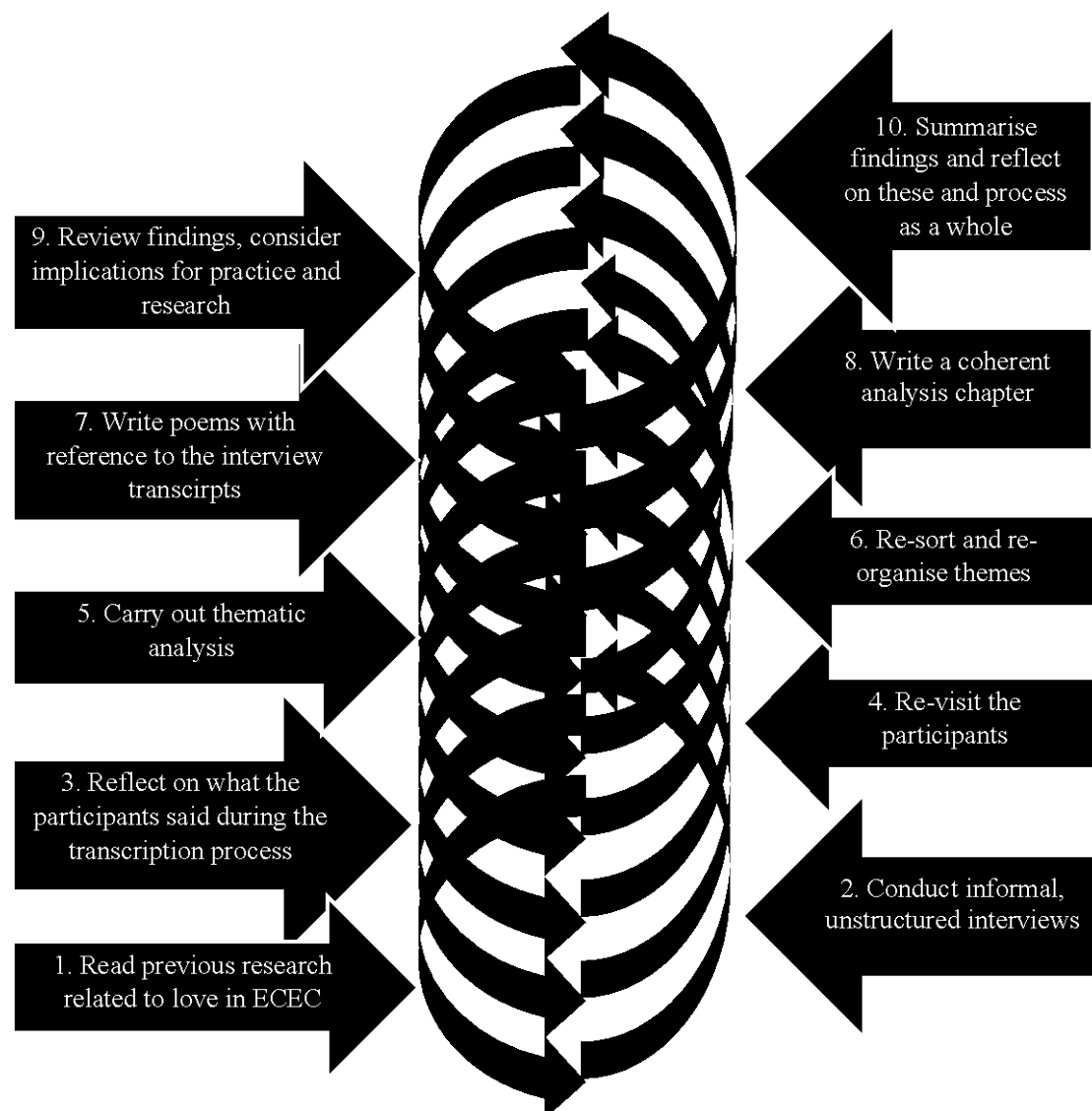


Figure 5-1: Spiral-patterned methodological process

## 5.1 Slow research: a spiral-patterned process

In this research I adopt what I conceived of as a spiral-patterned research design (see Figure 5-1), similar to de Carteret's (2008) notion of "the spiral of ideas" (p.241) that emerged through her writing. This recursive, cumulative research pattern allowed me flexibility and time to think about the data, re-consider the narratives at different phases of the work-in-progress and respond to it repeatedly.

Practitioners engaged in care work, including ECEC, draw on their moral frameworks and carry out a range of practical and thinking tasks that are "morally bounded" (Lynch, Baker and Lyons, 2009, p.59). Accordingly, in this research, I considered that "both words and feelings matter" (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997, p.64) and that a slow, sensitive, fluid methodological approach was appropriate.

At each new phase on the spiral pattern, I could incorporate further layers of my own accumulated insights gained through the reflective process. This 'spiral-patterned' research process contained places and times for "dwelling" (Phipps and Saunders, 2009, p.361, Barone, 2001, p.25), or pausing to think about the data, along the way. The process also contained moments for writing poetry (discussed later in this chapter) to convey the messages of the research in a different way.

Page (2013c) emphasised the value of adopting a similarly slow, recursive approach for research about love in ECEC. She argued that her "four-staged process of meaning-making" (p.10) allowed her to move forward from the "rawness" (p.10) of people's narratives to establish a critical, analytical approach. Page unpacked the intricate details and multiple dilemmas contained in such a painstaking process, and argued that such an approach was necessary if researchers are to think of themselves as "responsible researcher[s]" (p.23). The importance of developing an approach without haste, and in response to the particular circumstances of the research, was also advocated by Clandinin and Rosiek (2007). "Honest" (p.40) approaches, these authors suggested, consisted of "a series of choices ... undertaken through time" (Clandinin and Rosiek 2007, p.40).

My conceptualisation of a spiral-patterned research pathway allowed me space in which to reflect fully on the interviews, consider what was the responsible thing to do

at each stage, plan my next steps, read more, write, re-read, re-write, consider other ways to analyse the data, go back to the raw data, and try out other approaches.

## 5.2 Research questions

This section serves to remind the reader of the research questions. My overarching research question was:

- What do ECEC practitioners in diverse early years settings say about their role in relation to loving children in their care?

My subsidiary research questions were:

- What do policies say about love in the context of Early Childhood Education and Care?
- What do ECEC practitioners say about their formal training in relation to loving children in their care?
- What do ECEC practitioners say about their informal, life-learning in relation to loving children in their care?

## 5.3 Research participants

In this section I discuss my research sample and choice of participants. I selected five participants from a range of ECEC settings. My criteria for choosing the participants within this small sample took account of:

1. A variety of settings
2. A variety of social, cultural, educational and linguistic backgrounds
3. Leaders in their settings
4. Willingness to participate in the research.

All of the participants were female. This was not a planned decision, but simply arose since the majority of the people I was in close contact with in the early years sector during the research planning period were female. Additionally, and as Boyer, Reimer and Irvine (2012) pointed out in relation to their own predominantly female sample, the sample was a good reflection of the “(largely) female” (p.519) sector as a whole.

The five female participants I chose were located in five contrasting settings:

1. A private nursery, part of a nursery chain of five in a particular London locality
2. A large Children's Centre, established in the first round of Children's Centres
3. A nursery school attached to a Children's Centre
4. A nursery class attached to a two-form entry Primary School
5. A childminder's home setting.

Clearly, this selection is not representative of all early years workers. However, it offers diverse examples of working contexts. The different participants worked for individual owners, nursery headteachers or managers, school headteachers, or themselves. They worked on their own, in small centres, or as part of room or classroom teams within larger centres or schools.

The participants came from different socio-economic backgrounds and cultural heritages. I sought this personal and professional diversity in order to foreground the importance of personal histories and diverse cultural experiences. I also wanted to choose participants who held different qualifications or had followed different career routes into the profession. This was in order to answer one of my research questions: What do ECEC practitioners say about their formal training in relation to loving children in their care?

All five of the participants held managerial or leading practitioner roles in their settings. I made this choice because I wanted to elicit constructions of love in ECEC from the people who made the decisions about practice or led others to adopt particular approaches. So, although on the one hand I wanted a range of perspectives, I also wanted this range of perspectives to come from people who took a lead on developing practice in their settings. As leaders, these participants would be likely to be involved in shaping policies in their settings, and would have ownership of organisational and pedagogic approaches.

With the exception of the childminder, who was known to me personally, the participants came from settings I had worked in as an early years consultant for a local authority and as a link tutor on teacher training programmes. Carrying out research with people who are known to the researcher is not unusual in ECEC. Boyer, Reimer and Irvine (2012) noted, in relation to their research about childcare options in the UK, that this familiarity was a way of "establishing trust and gaining

access to workplaces that are strictly governed by child protection guidelines” (p.526). From a purely pragmatic perspective, permission to access early years settings was a crucial factor in my selection.

This aspect of choosing participants already known to me was also a potential flaw in the selection process. The fact that the participants knew me may have influenced what they chose to say to me. They may have felt restricted in some way, since it is possible that they still regarded me as a representative from the council or university, rather than as an independent researcher. I return to these considerations in the ethical section at the end of this chapter.

It was also important that the participants should be willing to be involved in the research, and, indeed, they all welcomed me into their settings, and responded positively to my invitation to participate. I introduced the idea at an early stage. When the time came for me to begin the research visits, however, one of the potential participants was on maternity leave, and therefore unavailable. In this instance, I arranged to involve her acting deputy head of centre instead, with whom I was also acquainted. This was the only aspect of the selection process that was unplanned.

In Figure 5-2 I present the participants and outline the key information I sought from them. The table cells pertaining to ‘Social Class’ and ‘Culture’ contain the participants’ own words.

Name	Type of setting	Role	Parent	Nationality	Social Class	Culture	Education
Hilary	Private Nursery (part of chain of four nurseries)	Manager	Y	British	"I don't know. I don't see myself as down there. I am working class and working, but everything my son I pay for myself."	"Scottish. The Scottish thing of cleaning the house. If you were in Scotland you would be doing this or that. You've got to have a clean house."	NVQ Level 3
Kathleen	Catholic Primary School	Foundation Stage Leader	Y	British	"Middle class"	"Irish in respect of family – idea of family and family history, values and Catholicism."	Cert Ed (Primary)
Ana	Children's Centre	Teacher, Acting Deputy Head	N	Portuguese	"Working class"	"Catholic"	BTec, BSc, PGCE (Primary)
Angela	Nursery School	Teacher	N	British	"Never clear... Middle class with a working class aspect to the way I think about some things"	"Don't like pigeon-holing myself"	BSc, PGCE (Primary and Early Years), BA
Flori	Childminder home	Childminder	N	Argentine	"Upper middle class (in Argentine terms), middle class (in British terms)"	"Latin (Spanish and Italian roots) – Latin in the sense of family, love, having friends around you, the network of love."	Degree in Human Resources

Figure 5-2: The participants

## 5.4 When and where I conducted the research: practical matters

In the section above I provided details about the participants with a rationale for the selection made. In this section I go through practical considerations such as when and where I conducted the interviews.

I conducted the interviews between April and June of 2012. I visited the participants at their own settings in order to accommodate their busy schedules and allow them time to talk about their own experiences with minimum interruptions. This decision served to maintain anonymity since ECEC practitioners from other settings would not witness the interviews and therefore would not know about the participants' involvement in the research. This arrangement to visit the participants at their settings also served to minimise potential disruption for them. Additionally, it helped to create a sense of ease between the participants and me, and this in turn would help to further support the natural flow of the interviews.

In the case of the three early years teachers I made arrangements to meet them after most of the children had left the premises. The manager of one of the other two settings preferred me to visit her in the middle of the morning. In the case of the childminder, I met with her in her kitchen during her lunch break, while the children were having their rests. The dates, time and location of each of the visits are available in Appendix 5.

For the first round of interviews, and with the permission of the participants, I used a small digital recorder. The size of the device served to lessen its presence and ease the flow of the interviews. I chose not to record the second visits since I planned these visits principally as opportunities for me to re-tell what each participant said back to them in my own words and develop a concept map to depict what they said. These visits also elicited further comments from the participants, and I recorded what they said in written notes. At a later stage, I regretted this decision not to record these meetings since I lacked transcripts of them for further analysis, and I discuss this later in this chapter. Although I did not take the concept maps forward through to the analysis, I did not regret visiting the participants for a second time, particularly since the visit served as a visible sign of my appreciation and thanks to them. All five participants appeared interested to listen to my interpretation of their constructions.

## **5.5 Rationale for planning and use of research activities**

In the section above I provided details about when and where I conducted the interviews with a rationale for choices made. In this section I give reasons for adopting particular research activities.

I carried out a series of research activities as depicted in the spiral-patterned process in Figure 5-1. Further details about the activities are summarised in Figure 5-3.



Activity	My role
1. Read previous research related to the love in ECEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carry out literature searches</li> <li>• Act on guidance from supervisor and other critical friends</li> <li>• Develop systems for making notes, organising reading, retrieving material when needed</li> </ul>
2. Conduct informal, unstructured interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer a “generative narrative question” (Flick, 2014, p.266) to stimulate discussions</li> <li>• Record interviews</li> <li>• Maintain an attentive pose, acknowledging all contributions</li> <li>• Offer further prompts as necessary</li> </ul>
3. Reflect on what the participants said during transcription	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen to the recordings, stopping, rewinding and replaying them until I capture the narratives verbatim</li> <li>• Re-experience the interviews through this transcription phase</li> </ul>
4. Re-visit the participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re-tell the content of the interviews back to the respective participants</li> <li>• Offer further opportunities for participants to adjust what they said or say more about love in ECEC</li> <li>• Thank the participants</li> </ul>
5. Carry out thematic analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re-read the transcripts identifying recurring themes</li> <li>• Sort themes and sub-themes into a set of main themes</li> <li>• Consider more closely what the participants said in relation to each theme</li> <li>• Make links with literature</li> <li>• Identify themes that do not occur in literature</li> </ul>
6. Re-sort and re-organise themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re-organise themes following further insights gained through analysis, including consideration of what the participants gave particular emphasis to</li> </ul>
7. Write poems with reference to the interview transcripts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attend poetry workshops</li> <li>• Write poems in response to particular sections of the interviews</li> <li>• <i>Rationale: To respond the to some of the content of the interviews in a less linear form</i></li> </ul>
8. Write a coherent analysis chapter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write a coherent chapter to present the analysis of the interviews</li> <li>• Make further changes as necessary</li> <li>• Make links with literature and identify areas for further discussion</li> </ul>
9. Review findings, consider implications for practice and future research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stop</li> <li>• Re-read the analysis</li> <li>• Consider findings</li> <li>• Identify implications for practice and future research</li> </ul>
10. Summarise findings and reflect on these and process as a whole	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re-read thesis</li> <li>• Reflect on findings and suitability of approach</li> <li>• Consider possible next steps</li> </ul>

**Figure 5-3: Research activities on the spiral-patterned pathway**

The ensuing sections in this part of the chapter outline the different decisions I made in respect of the research process as a whole and the different activities I engaged in. I also offer rationales for the different choices I made under the following sub-headings:

- Why a qualitative, narrative inquiry?
- Why individual, unstructured interviews?

### 5.5.1 Why a qualitative, narrative inquiry?

“Beliefs shape how the qualitative researcher sees the world and acts on it” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p.33). My philosophical positioning, therefore, fed into the methodological choices I made. As outlined in Chapter four, I adopt a non-positivist, pragmatic, postmodern stance. The methodological approach I adopted, then, aligns with my philosophical beliefs, and rests comfortably with uncertainty, non-linear approaches and lack of precision as I seek insights, raise questions and expose contradictions.

I chose to carry out a narrative inquiry and adopt Chase’s (2008) definition of the approach:

Contemporary narrative inquiry can be characterised as an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches and both traditional and innovative methods – all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by those who live them. (p.58)

This approach is underpinned by a belief in “lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding” (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007, p.42). In other words, people come to know and understand the world through their experiences of living in it. If, as Flick (2014) wrote, “narratives are constructions of events that are reported” (p.288), a narrative approach, I felt, would offer participants the opportunity to construct love as they experience it in ECEC.

In agreement with Richards and St Pierre (2008) and de Carteret (2008), I do not claim that narrative inquiry explains situations or provides conclusive answers. Narrative inquiry, instead, helped me to gain insights, perceive things differently, make connections, and learn about people’s lives and work situations. With Richardson (1990), I believe that “narrative is the best way to understand the human experience because it is the way humans understand their lives” (p.65), and, with Sikes (2012), that “human beings are storying beings” (p.564). As Lewis (2011) put forward, “it is through the story that we come to know, through the story of the other” (p.505). Narratives, as Richardson (1990) pointed out, are how people make sense of, or “reconstruct” (p.23), their lives, and as such provide the “malleable” (Richardson, 1990, p.23) stuff of the research.

### 5.5.2 Why individual, unstructured interviews?

I planned to carry out interviews with the participants in order to allow them to elaborate on the topic. I chose to carry out “responsive interviews” (Flick, 2014, p.208). As Flick put forward, this style of interview focuses on what interviewees consider most important in relation to any topic. It also offered me the opportunity of prompting as I felt appropriate at different points in the interviews. Such “spontaneous interventions by the interviewer” (p.208) are features of responsive interviews.

I decided to conduct individual interviews because I felt this was the most appropriate method through which to elicit people’s constructions of love in ECEC. Caine and Estefan (2011) suggested that “relationships are at the heart of narrative inquiry” (p.969). The individual interviews, I felt, facilitated this relational aspect and allowed the stories to “emerge” (p.969).

The individual interviews, I decided, would also allow the participants the privacy and time to elaborate on the topic, as well as minimise any anxiety they might have felt about how others might interpret what they said. Individual interviews would also provide scope for me to pose additional questions in response to particular points.

I decided not to carry out focus groups. I was aware of what I might lose through this decision. For example, focus groups would allow the participants to establish shared meanings with each other, or allow a group construction of love in ECEC to be made, which would be interesting. Nevertheless, I was persuaded by the potential advantages of carrying out individual interviews instead. Firstly, I wanted to maintain the anonymity of each of the participants, and the fact that I carried out individual interviews in their settings ensured that practitioners from other settings need not know about their involvement in the research or learn what they said. Secondly, I considered that individual interviews would minimise any chance that what the participants said would be steered in any way by what other participants might say. Finally, I wanted to focus all my attention on what each participant said, without having to also act as a chair, coaxing some participants to speak more about a topic, or encouraging others to develop particular themes.

I carried out the interviews, one after the other, within a fairly short period of time (see Appendix 5). As I conducted each interview I assimilated what each participant said into my thinking on the topic. Themes emerged during one interview that shifted my focus or coloured my thinking for the next, and so on. This is at once a strength and limitation of the process. The new ideas enriched the content of the interviews and expanded the focus of the research. This aspect of newly emerging themes also produced new points to consider within the research as each participant gave one or other point more or less emphasis.

I decided not to lead structured or semi-structured interviews since I did not want to impose any limitations on what the participants might choose to say. Instead, I wanted to create an open opportunity for them to tell me about love in the context of their work spontaneously, in any way they chose to. Although, as put forward in Section 4.5, I acknowledge that my own positioning inevitably played a part in shaping the constructions, I wanted to elicit the participants' own constructions on the topic as far as possible. Accordingly, I posed a "generative narrative question" (Flick, 2014, p.266) so as to stimulate talk about love in ECEC. I reminded the participants about my research interest in the topic of love and invited them to talk about love in the context of their work. Examples of the generative narrative questions I posed were:

- Do you remember? We talked about loving children. Tell me about that.
- Remember I showed you what the research was about. Really, what I am interested in is how teachers/practitioners feel able to love children in their care. Tell me about it.

I did not refer to a scripted question, or read an opening prompt, since I felt that this would impose a formality on the meeting, and might lessen the participants' sense of ease with the situation. As the participants developed their interviews and told me stories about their work and themselves, I became fully immersed in the interview situation and continued to think about what they said as I developed the research.

In short, I wanted the participants to talk about love in ECEC in response to my questions, and these unstructured, individual interviews, I felt, were appropriate for a topic such as this one.

## **5.6 Transcription and analysis**

In the preceding section I offered my rationale for the different methodological choices I made. I considered why I carried out a qualitative, narrative inquiry, as well as why I carried out individual, unstructured interviews. I now go through the steps I took to analyse the data. The section is organised under the following three headings:

- Transcription as part of the analytical tool
- Writing as part of the analytical process
- Analysis through identification and exploration of themes: justification and process.

### **5.6.1 Transcription as part of the analytical process**

I transcribed all the interviews as soon as possible after the actual interviews took place. In most cases I began the transcription process on the same day as the interview, or the next day, and continued whenever possible until completion. This timing was important since the very recent experience of the interviews facilitated the transcription process. In sections when the recordings were difficult to understand, for example, my recent recollections of the discussions helped me to decode the sound into meaningful text.

During the transcription process I listened to the tapes repeatedly, and this formed part of the meaning-making process. As I listened to the recordings, I made connections, became more familiar with the content of the interviews, and began to identify possible themes to explore.

### **5.6.2 Writing as part of the analytical process**

I considered the process of writing as a further analytical tool in the research. I was engaging in a process of what Pelias (2011) referred to as “writing into” (p.660) my research rather than simply writing it up at the end. The action of writing, in other words, would help me to develop my thinking about the data throughout the period of the research. I used writing to help me shape the research as it developed, rather than to simply present it at the end. I write to learn, learn as I write. As with St Pierre (2011), it was “the setting-to-work of writing that forced the rupture and demanded I move on” (p.621). I developed my thinking as I wrote. Each new reading of a piece of literature or a transcript fed into my thinking, which then took shape through the

action of writing. In other words, it was mainly during my “thinking/writing” (p.621) activity that I developed this thesis.

My own life story also had a place in the research. With Richardson (1990), I believe that narrative writing helps me to understand my own life. At times on the spiral-patterned pathway, then, I wrote about my own childhood experiences, and, throughout the process gained a more immediate, sensual understanding about the narratives in the research. (See Appendix 6 for examples of these.) I did not consider this personal aspect of the writing to be an obstacle. Richardson (2002), for example, wrote:

Troubled with the ethical issues of doing research “on” others, I wrote about my own life. I did unto myself as I had done unto others. (Richardson, 2002, p.43)

While I acknowledge that I am limited by my understanding of the world, and that whatever I write I do it from my own perspective as a “social actor” (Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont, 2003, p.132) in the world, nevertheless, my unique experiences, outlooks and perceptions make it possible for me to create something new and offer a unique interpretation. With Bochner (2002), I believe that “the purpose of self-narrative is to extract meaning from experience rather than to depict experience exactly as it was lived” (p.262).

### **5.6.3 Analysis through identification and exploration of themes: justification and process**

I carried out a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts. I adopted Braun and Clarke’s (2006) definition of thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p.79). Braun and Clarke wrote that thematic analysis is a highly flexible approach and can be used within different theoretical frameworks to do different things. I adopted it as a “constructionist method” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.81), whereby it

... examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society. (p.81)

I chose this method because it was a good accompaniment to my unstructured interview approach in which there were no limits on what different people might say. Flick (2014) wrote that thematic analysis in research “is founded on analysing

subjective viewpoints” (p.423). This factor was important in research about a little-talked-about subject that, I felt, would inevitably involve reference to people’s wider life experiences beyond their professional identities. I applied Braun and Clarke’s definition of the word theme to mean “some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set” (Braun and Clarke’s emphasis, p.82). I wrote the frequently recurring themes as headings on small pieces of paper and sorted them into groups until I arrived at key headings. This exercise allowed me to identify the most frequently recurring themes, as shown at a work-in-progress stage in Figure 5-4.

### Recurring themes

Theme	Hilary	Ana	Angela	Flori	Kathleen
Love with limits/boundaries – not the same as familial love	✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓
• Professional love like familial love				✓	✓
• Children like practitioner's own children		✓		✓	
Professionals as people – importance of sharing fact that they may be having a bad day	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Emotional labour	✓		✓✓✓✓	✓	✓
Tough/hard/good love – for the future	✓	✓✓✓✓	✓		✓
• Important for healthy child development	✓	✓	✓		✓
• Attachment theory	✓	✓			
• Importance of mental hugs					✓
Love – love being with children	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓		✓✓	✓
Importance of touch		✓	✓	✓	✓
• Love as visible, demonstrative					✓
Love as natural	✓✓✓	✓✓			✓✓
• No training for love	✓	✓	✓		
• Cultural differences			✓✓	✓✓✓	
• Love learned from mother	✓✓				
Love for the wider family	✓		✓		✓
Complexity of role		✓✓	✓✓		
• Dilemma – corporeal knowledge v. restrictive policies		✓	✓	✓	
• Professionals as less important than mothers				✓	
• Love as time-limited				✓	
• Isolation			✓	✓✓	
• Pain of separation				✓	
• Burden of regulatory requirements – heavy workload			✓	✓✓	✓✓✓✓
Parents want practitioners to love their children		✓✓	✓		
Children as giving love		✓	✓		
Love as different with every child				✓	✓
Love as different with every adult					✓
Love as 'care'	✓		✓		

Figure 5-4 Recurring themes



In each cell, I indicated how many times the themes and sub-themes recurred or not, as appropriate. I worked on the table over five iterations, the full set of which is available in Appendix 1. I sorted themes, changed the order of themes according to emphasis or frequency, and identified how often each participant mentioned things, or used particular words. I made further changes to the order of themes as I gained further insights from the data and developed my analysis through the writing process. I rearranged the table with different colours to denote the different themes. (See Figure 5-5)

Recurring themes – Contradictions – 13<sup>th</sup> May 2014

Theme	Hilary	Ana	Angela	Flori	Kathleen	Frequency participants, times mentioned + Notes
• Related or contrasting sub-theme						
Tough/hard/good love – for the future	✓✓✓ Strong emphasis	✓✓✓ Strong emphasis	✓✓✓ 1 <sup>st</sup> paragraph 1 <sup>st</sup> mention Strong emphasis Linked to child development	✓✓ 1 <sup>st</sup> paragraph Educate children Children will have good memories	✓✓ Clear expectations Children know boundaries Fairness Linked to child development	5/23 Different in Flori's transcript Ana – separation between tough love and child development
• Important for healthy child development	✓	✓✓✓ Children need hugs if away from home all day Children need love	✓✓✓		✓✓	
• Importance of mental hugs					✓	
• Attachment theory	✓	✓				
Love as natural in some people	✓✓✓✓ 1 <sup>st</sup> mention 1 <sup>st</sup> paragraph Natural in some people Reason for choosing work	✓✓✓✓ Love as natural Linked to early career choice Natural to need love Natural in some	✓✓✓ Working on the basis of how things feel, gut instincts Distinction between immediate and in-your-head responses (Osgood, 10)		✓✓ Innate, intrinsic in some people Natural to show demonstrative love	3/14
Importance of touch	Linked to	✓ Joint 1 <sup>st</sup> mention 1 <sup>st</sup> paragraph Restrictions imposed by policy	✓✓ No restrictions All comfortable with it Knows it is important through wider reading Strong emphasis	✓	✓✓✓✓✓ Joint 1 <sup>st</sup> mention 1 <sup>st</sup> paragraph Strong emphasis Tangible, physical, demonstrative love	4/9
Professionals as human beings – importance of sharing fact that they may be having a bad day	✓ Last paragraph 3 <sup>rd</sup> importance	✓ 1 <sup>st</sup> paragraph 1 <sup>st</sup> mention (Children will be sensitive to this and give a hug)	✓ Strong emphasis	✓ Human beings	✓ As in 'fallible'	5
• Linked to emotional labour and complexity of role			✓✓✓✓ Emotional response			
Love with limits/boundaries – not the same as familial love	✓ 3 <sup>rd</sup> importance In relation to own parenthood	✓ 2 <sup>nd</sup> importance Imposed by policy	✓✓✓ 1 <sup>st</sup> mention 1 <sup>st</sup> paragraph			3/5
• Professional love like familial love				✓	✓	2 In contradiction to them of love with limits
• Children like practitioner's own children		✓		✓		In contradiction to them of love with limits

Figure 5-5 Recurring themes and contradictions (colour coded)

I then colour coded the transcripts with comments in the margins to match the colours on the table. I used the themes as headings, and the colour coding helped me to identify key sections in each transcript to include within the prose for discussion. (A section of a colour coded transcript is available in Appendix 3.) After a period of writing the data analysis section, I noticed that just because a theme was frequently recurring did not mean that participants gave it the most emphasis. As Braun and

Clarke (2006) wrote, “the “keyness” of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures” (p.82). Accordingly, I re-organised the order in which I discussed the themes in relation to how important I felt each theme was within each construction, and in relation to the thesis as a whole.

## 5.7 Poetry in research

In the section above I outlined the transcription and analysis processes I engaged in, including writing and identification of themes as analytical tools. In this section I offer a rationale for including three poems in the analysis chapter.

My reasons for using poetry in the thesis are as follows:

1. Poetry emphasises the provisional nature of what is being represented
2. Poetry is a part of who I am
3. Poetry conveys things in a different way
4. Poetry provides a break in the continuous prose
5. There is a long tradition of using poetry to present rigorous research (e.g. Darwin, 1802, Hurston, 1937)
6. Poetry is used widely in current social science research (e.g. Richardson, 1993, Lapum, 2011, Limes-Taylor, 2014).

Firstly, poetry represented my belief that scholarly forms of writing are not always the most fitting medium through which to communicate certain aspects of life or highlight particular points (Barone, 2001, Ceglowski, 2002, Neilsen, 2008, Leggo, 2008, Sandelowski, 1984, Phipps and Saunders, 2009, Rorty, 1991). Poetry as an aesthetic form of communication, I suggest, serves less to show or provide proof of something (Sandelowski, 1984), and more to create new ways of perceiving things, give new shape to thought, acknowledge the uncertain nature of what is sometimes presented as research (Neilsen, 2008).

Secondly, I find poetry helpful. It is part of who I am as a person. My father recited poems to me when I was a child and wrote short poems for me when he lived abroad. I learned to appreciate rhyme and verse from a very young age. My father’s own mother, my American grandmother, also wrote lyrics and poems. I come from a family who migrated from continent to continent for a variety of reasons. As a

family, we learned to live apart from each other, and sometimes we used poetry to express our love for each other. I have also attended poetry workshops, set my own lyrics to my own musical compositions, listened to poetry for enjoyment, and read poetry out loud. Accordingly, I was drawn to this form of expression in my thesis. It seemed like the natural thing to do. When I presented my research-in-progress at an international conference, for example, I began by reading from a paper in a rather stilted manner. When I moved onto the poems, however, I relaxed into the presentation, was able to talk about my research in my own words, and gained a better rapport with the audience.

Thirdly, poetry allowed me a means through which to present the data in a different way to stimulate renewed attention on the topic (Winterson, 1996, Phipps and Saunders, 2009, Lapum et al 2011). Lapum, Ruttonsha, Chursh, Yau and David (2011) used poetry to “disrupt the way [people] see, perceive, and understand ... the world around [them]” (p.112). The authors found that nurses who supported patients through open-heart surgery became quite accustomed to the technical practices and procedures of this work, and that the use of poetry in an exhibition would lead to a disruption of the usual ways of seeing things, “calling attention to these deeply entrenched routines” (p.102). I found this idea useful in my own research in which people talk about their practice in their ECEC settings, some of which might be quite habitual. I was also drawn to this idea of presenting things in a different form so that my interpretations of people’s constructions of love in ECEC might stand out, or be perceived differently.

Fourthly, poetry provided a break in the continuous prose. This was not only a break in a visual sense, with fewer words more sparsely laid out to view on the page, but also a break in activity. The poems served as an opportunity too for the researcher and reader to break from the academic discussion. Poems could serve instead as opportunities to stop, or “dwell momentarily” (Barone, 2001, p.25) within the discussions.

Fifthly, I was encouraged by the long-established tradition of applying poetry to social science research. Erasmus Darwin (1802), for example, presented his studies about the origins of society through verse, with lengthy footnotes and appendices in prose. In the preface he made it clear that he “does not pretend to instruct by deep

researches of reasoning” (p.6), but to touch people’s imagination. Zora Neale Hurston, too, in her novel *Their eyes were watching God* (1937), used “figurative language” (Johnson, 1986, p.161) and poetry to reconstruct the stories she heard in the neighbourhood where she grew up. She drew on her anthropological training to present her cultural heritage through her literary works (Johnson, 1986, p.90). Jerome Rothenberg and Dennis Tedlock belonged to a group of ethnopoeists who, in the 1960s and 1970s, sought to explore particular cultures through performance poetry (Rothenberg, 2002). Rothenberg viewed the poetic text “as an instrument for modelling and containing meaning” (Scappertone, 2011, p.782). Their scholarly performance poetry was a creative process since, as Tedlock (2011) affirmed, “definitive text has no place in ethnopoeistics” ([www.poemsandpoetics.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.poemsandpoetics.blogspot.co.uk)).

Finally, I was encouraged by the growing pervasiveness of poetry in research (e.g. Richardson, 1993, Lapum, 2011, Lapum et al, 2012, Limes-Taylor, 2014, Clark, 2013). For all of these reasons I was drawn to include poetry in this educational research.

Despite my strong desire to promote poetry, however, I also believe that poetry in research should be carefully crafted, and that diligent efforts should be made to ensure that it is aesthetically pleasing. I concur with Sikes (2012), who warned of the dangers of presenting poor poetry as research. Such activities, she proposed, “do no service to their author or to the acceptance of them as legitimate forms of social science representation” (p.572). Accordingly, I attended poetry workshops to develop my skills, and was careful to compose the poems “on the basis of data” (Sikes, 2012, p.571). As in work by Richardson (1993), I wrote two out of three of the poems in this thesis solely on extracts from the transcripts. Although I present only three poems, I actually wrote several poems as part of the research process, and all of these helped me to think about the data.

## **5.8 Ethical considerations**

In this section I discuss the steps I took and methodological choices I made to address ethical considerations. In the first instance, I gained informed consent from the participants. I told them about the research at an early stage. Nearer the time of the

research, I confirmed that they wished to participate, providing full details, orally and in writing, about the process and what was involved. I was aware that participants could become emotionally affected by any sensitive issues they talked about during the interviews. Accordingly, I prepared a list of national helplines and organisations for them to contact if necessary (see Appendix 4).

I did not use the participants' own names in the thesis. The five participants agreed to be referred to by the pseudonyms I chose for them to reflect their cultural heritages, and this was specifically acknowledged as appropriate by one of the participants.

There were several other ethical issues I needed to consider, mainly resulting from the very personal nature of this work, but also from some of the distinctive qualities of narrative inquiry, and my own involvement in the process of analysis.

I was conscious that I could not speak for the participants, or make claims for constituencies to which I did not belong, for, as Richardson (1990) questions, why should I write somebody else's life? I was acutely conscious of the "heavy ethical burden" (p.14) of writing about other people's lives. Accordingly, I could not think of myself as a mouthpiece for the participants. However, as Sikes (2012) proposes, all social science writing is in some way autobiographical since the researcher is inevitably present in it. I concur with Sikes (2012), who expressed the view that, in "writing other people's lives our own lives, our beliefs and values, our positionality, inevitably are implicated" (p.8). The interviews were constructed with me and at my instigation, and existed for my use. Anything that I did with them was inevitably situated, lensed, positioned and partial.

There were other issues I considered that were associated specifically with narrative inquiry. Snyder-Young (2011) raised the issue about researchers claiming to know the Other and, with reference to narrative performance research, emphasised the live aspects of 'everyday' stories that are told unscripted, and which change with each re-telling. Narrative research, Snyder-Young pointed out, may not represent participants' stories so much as stories researchers tell about participants' stories. Atkinson (2010) exposed a situation where her own narrative inquiry research about how teachers confront issues such as racism in their teaching, when re-presented to practitioners, met with a lack of affirmation. Atkinson (2010) proposed that narrative

studies do not always resonate with the participants who generate the narratives, and that opportunities for critical conversations and shared inquiry should be developed.

Gadd (2007), too, with reference to his own research with a participant whose story he had originally excluded from his research, pointed out that interviewees' accounts are not always faithful. He emphasised that "stories are constructed" (p.398), and people sometimes "revise their stories" (p.386), or use their story-telling "to reaffirm meanings" (p.398). Some participants may put up defences against their own feelings of anxiety. This may be partly caused by the interviewers' own "failure" (p.392), for example, as sensitive researchers, as "defended subjects" (p.398) themselves, unwilling to open up to the participants, or by adopting too narrow a focus, and failing to take an interest in their participants' wider stories. Gadd emphasised the importance of careful preparation, sensitivity and experience, especially since participants' "emotional needs can be considerable" (p.397), and called for researchers to be aware of their own "defensiveness" (p.398).

Denzin (2008) cautioned that stories in research may sometimes become disembodied narratives for analysis, objects "ripped or torn out of" (p.117) their contexts.

Accordingly, I asked myself: Did I snatch the participants' constructions from them for the purposes of developing my research? Did my interpretations of the interviews match the participants' lived realities? These questions troubled me. To this end I remained in touch with the participants. I re-visited them as part of the interpretive process. I wanted to talk through my emerging thinking with the participants and learn more in conversation with them. I also felt this was the ethical thing to do. Ellis (2009) discovered the importance of this from her own experience. She found out that participants from one of her research projects learned about themselves from a third party, when someone read a section of her book back to them. She learned that they expressed their disappointment in this. Accordingly, Ellis tells her own students that "whenever possible, they should take their work back to participants" (p.311).

## **5.9 Summary of key limitations**

In this section I consider possible limitations ensuing from the methodological choices I made. Firstly I discuss issues of validity; secondly, the question of whether

I could have conducted the interviews in a better way; and thirdly, whether I should have chosen a wider range of participants, for example, including at least one man.

The validity of the research may be questioned in respect of two factors, firstly, that I knew the research participants, and, secondly, that what the participants said in the interviews may not be the same as what they might say about love in ECEC today. The participants knew me “in a non-research capacity” (Morse, 1994, p.27), so, despite guidance by Morse (1994), I was unable to enter the scene as a stranger. I decided that the best approach was to be open about this with the participants.

I noted that some of the participants began by talking about what they thought they felt they should be saying to me as a local authority or university representative. One participant, for example, checked whether it was acceptable to swear in the interview:

Hilary: I said to her: Why did you stay with him? [...] He is an asshole. I don't know if I can swear (*speaks quietly*) - a wanker. You know. He wasn't a father.

I do not know whether the participants ever fully lost this awareness, but I did experience entering a new kind of relationship with them as the research developed. At the second visit, for example, one of the participants offered some very personal information after the interview that she might not have done at an earlier stage. The tone of the email communication became less formal with all the participants. One of the participants pointed out that I had made some ‘typos’ in the transcript I sent her and another used informal language to express her affirmation of the transcript.

I acknowledged that what the participants constructed for me would not necessarily match what they would construct in a different or subsequent interview. Living stories, as Atkinson (2010) wrote, change at each re-telling. Written versions of stories, on the other hand, are fossilised, fixed, permanent, and disembedded from the living contexts whence they emanate. Interviews are like snapshots taken at a particular moment and from a particular stance. Prompted by Gadd's (2004) considerations in respect of his research, I also wondered whether I might have opened up spaces for the participants to say more.

There are limitations to the sample I selected and approach I adopted. The findings in this research are based on what the five participants told me in response to my



opening question about love in the context of their work. They are based on what the participants said to me at a particular moment in time. There has inevitably been a time lapse between when the interviews were conducted and the reporting of them in this thesis. Nearly three years on, and in line with research by Snyder-Young (2011), Atkinson (2010) and Gadd (2004), I acknowledge that what the participants in this research would now say will inevitably be different to what they said at our research meetings.

I also acknowledge my own limitations as an interviewer. As Gadd (2004) found, research participants may put up defences against their own feelings of anxiety. I too acknowledge that I may have put up my own defences. In other words, perhaps unknowingly, I may have protected myself from anything I did not want to hear or include in this study. I may have been unaware of my own limited focus at the time, and thereby may have excluded much of what the participants really wanted to say to me about love in ECEC.

My analysis of the narratives, I acknowledge, is also limited by the breadth and depth of my own knowledge and understanding. The sample of participants in this study is very small. I did no more than interview five people working in the early years sector in 2012. It is also regretful that there was no male as part of the research sample, especially since this might have added a richer base and more diverse perspective on love in ECEC. I agree with Grant's (2002) position that ECEC practitioners should support children to develop broad views in relation to gender, particularly in the face of cultural and social gender stereotyping. I believe that having males as role models in ECEC settings is one such way of doing this. At the same time, I also considered whether, had I included one male participant, I might have been inclined to attribute anything distinctive about his views to his gender, and this would have been problematic. In a sense, the same problem could be ascribed in respect of the childminder participant whose situation differed considerably from those of the other participants. Accordingly, I needed to guard against attributing distinctive features about what she said to her particular situation.

I regretted not having recorded the second visits to the participants. I acknowledge that, although I gathered some further elaborations on the topic, and was able to

express my gratitude to the participants, face to face, I did not capture the nuances of their conversation in the way that I had been able to do during the first interviews.

I am also conscious that what my participants said did not necessarily match what they did in practice, as I did not carry out observations of the participants in action as part of this research. However, my own approach was to understand and make meaning from what the participants said about love in ECEC, which the methodology I adopted allowed me to do.

In this chapter I have outlined and justified the process I developed and the choices I made in order to make sense of the participants' constructions of love in ECEC. In the next chapter I present and discuss my findings.

## 6 DATA ANALYSIS

### 6.1 Introduction to data analysis chapter

In this chapter I analyse the data, namely the interview transcripts. I finally selected eight themes to focus on in the following order:

1. Love as preparing children for the future
2. Touch as an expression of love
3. Love as natural
4. Love as in ‘love to be with children’
5. Professionals as human beings
6. The relationship between love in familial contexts and love in ECEC settings
7. Childhood experiences of love (or lack of love) and love in ECEC settings
8. Love and training.

As discussed in Chapter five, I arrived at the theme headings through close reading of the five interview transcripts. I identified frequently recurring themes, as well as themes to which the participants gave particular emphasis. I clustered sub-themes within main themes and rearranged the order several times according to importance until I arrived at the eight themes (see Appendix 1). The order in which I discuss the themes correlates with the emphasis the participants gave them. They all emphasised the importance of love for children’s future healthy development, for example, so this theme appears first. Similarly, the final theme relates to training, which they said very little about.

The participants talked at length and with very little prompting in response to my question about love in ECEC. Analysis of the transcripts with notes revealed that these extended, on average, over thirteen pages, ranging from eleven to fifteen pages each. Four out of five of the participants talked with very little prompting from me. Indeed, the transcripts of three of the participants spread over two full pages without interruptions. Additionally, some of my interjections were only to affirm what the participants were saying, or to signal my close attention.

The participants' constructions of love in ECEC were, in reality, as diverse and contradictory as people's lives, and this attempt to organise the chapter into sections, I acknowledge, is out of step with this complexity. Nevertheless, I felt the sections were necessary in order to make my meaning clear to the reader and avoid repetition. This fits in with Sikes's (2012) use of headings in a chapter "to provide a framework for comprehension of a complex, messy and interrelated range of issues and considerations" (p.564). I made this choice about structure for similar reasons. The participants' constructions were made in an extemporaneous, in-the-moment, non-linear manner, unlike the segmented text I present here. One complete interview transcript is included in Appendix 2 as an illustration of the original transcriptions.

To redress this tension, I interweave the text with three poems. The poems are my attempt to re-present sections of transcripts in a less linear frame, and, like some of Richardson's (2002) writings, are "structured rhizomatically, the way life is experienced" (p.50). In other words, the poems are presented in a different way to the rest of the text, assume a less formal shape, and take unexpected turns. This is to mirror the surprising and inexplicable turns in people's lives.

In this chapter I consider how the interview transcripts answer the research questions, as identified in Chapter one. My overarching research question was:

- What do ECEC practitioners in diverse early years settings say about their role in relation to loving children in their care?

My subsidiary research questions were:

- What do policies say about love in the context of Early Childhood Education and Care?
- What do ECEC practitioners say about their formal training in relation to loving children in their care?
- What do ECEC practitioners say about their informal, life-learning in relation to loving children in their care?

I attempt to answer these questions through my exploration of the eight themes.

I include frequent extracts from the transcripts in this analysis. Some sections of these extracts are separated by ellipses ([...]). These represent repetitive words or

phrases that the participants used that do not add any meaning to the interview sections in question, e.g. “*actually*”, “*the thing about*”, “*you know*”. The main reason for this decision was to make the extracts from the transcripts easier to read. Another reason arose from ethical considerations. When I returned the transcripts to the participants, some of them expressed surprise at how frequently they repeated these sorts of words and phrases. The dots, then, also represent an ethical consideration since I did not want to expose any features of the participants’ interview responses that might cause them any embarrassment. I use a dash (–) to show a breaking off of words and sentences, as well as pauses or breaks in the flow of the interviews. Sometimes the participants stopped talking mid-sentence, for example, and at other times they paused to think about what to say next or changed the way they phrased their thoughts.

It is important to emphasise at the beginning of this chapter that the constructions were of love in ECEC. Angela, one of the participants, used the word love only three times in her interview, despite the fact that this was the focus of all the questions. She tended to use words and phrases other than love, for example having a “*bond*”, offering “*care*”, or engaging in “*warm relations*”. When Angela *did* say love, she offered alternatives. For example, she said: “*I think you can certainly love or whatever or have a bond with a child*”. Despite this avoidance of the word love, however, it was clear that Angela was talking about love since she said these things in response to my questions about love in ECEC. Further, what she said correlated with some of the definitions and understandings of love, as identified in the introduction and Chapter two.

## 6.2 Omissions

Before I begin my exploration of these eight themes, I think it is important to mention what the participants did *not* say in their interviews. I conducted unstructured interviews so, inevitably, the participants did not cover every theme identified in the transcripts as a whole.

None of the participants made any substantial reference to national policy matters in relation to love. I prompted them all to talk about this, but they did not take up this

topic. Instead, they talked about their own setting policies and how these restricted, or not, their freedom to be demonstrative in their love for children.

Without further probing or prompting it is not possible to know the reasons why this omission occurred. However, as I have shown in Chapter two, current ECEC policy in England says very little about love, and this is likely to be a contributory factor.

The sections below consider what the participants *did* say in relation to each of my identified themes. As I go through each theme in turn I also mention which participants did not discuss it. This information is also available in the tables in Appendix 1.

### **6.3 Theme 1: Love as preparing children for the future**

The participants talked about love in the sense of preparing children for their lives as older children and adults. They alluded to their motivation to help children develop their personal, social and emotional skills for the future. This point is explained in the following section of Hilary's transcript:

Hilary: Love is not just about hugging them or kissing them or being there for them. It's helping children to grow, making sure that the choices that they make, whether they are right or wrong [...] making them see that every action they do has a consequence. And [...] not just being their friend, but, you know, also being a teacher as well.

Hilary said that she took on the role of a teacher, and helped children to acquire habits "*that they need to have later on in life*". As an example of this, she related a story about a child at her nursery who, despite frequent expressions of encouragement from staff, would not eat breakfast while the "*breakfast bar*" was open. Instead, she would ask for it just after it closed. Hilary told me what she said to the child after one such an occurrence:

Hilary: Well look! We've put it away. We did tell you, and we did ask you. You are too late now and you'll have to wait until snack bar.

Hilary said that this approach helped the child to learn.

Hilary: Because next time when we went to her and said: Breakfast is going away in five minutes. If you don't come now it will be gone like last time. OK. And she came and she sat and she had breakfast.

Hilary referred to this style of love as “*hard*” and “*good*” love, and said “*You’ve got to have both*”. Although this “gentle and firm” (CWDC, 2007, Example S25/1) stance was offered as an example of effective practice in the professional standards for Early Years Professional Status (see Section 2.3.2, Chapter two), Hilary, like all the participants in this study, was trained before these standards were introduced in 2007.

When Hilary said she offered children this “*hard love*”, then, it could be that she was trying to teach them lessons for the future, which she constructed as a good thing.

Hilary: Teach the children how to talk and have social skills and communication skills so that the children can do that as well.

Hilary called this approach “*hard love*”, and this “*hard love*” forms part of an ensemble of behaviours that the participants talked about in their constructions about love. Hilary implied that she invested in children’s future not only by teaching children but also by helping their parents, as necessary.

Hilary: This helps the children, which is what, for me, my main goal is: helping the parents and, more so, helping the children.

Ana constructed love as preparing children for the future. She said that telling children what is right and wrong was as important as love in shaping their future development. She said: “*You need to say ‘No’.*” One interpretation may be that Ana understood this approach as an integral part of love for children, supporting children to feel not only loved, but also worthy of love. Another possible interpretation is that Ana wanted to be loved by the children, rather than be “*the bad one*” colleagues sent children to. This resonates with some of the literature reviewed in Chapter two (Goldstein, 1998, Shin, 2010, Quan-McGimpsey, 2011), which emphasised the two-way benefits of loving children, with ECEC practitioners also enjoying their relationships with children.

Over and above these stated benefits to the ECEC practitioners, Ana said “*I think every child needs to be loved*” and that children benefit from a loving approach:

Ana: You can't go through life without being loved, and [...] I think a child – if a child is not loved [...] that child, he's going to find it very difficult to have a normal life in the sense of socialising, of making friendships, of being able to trust people, all of that. I think every child needs to be loved.

Thus Ana said that a loving approach would help children to develop friendships, trust people and generally “*have a normal life*” in the future. These words, which Ana expressed clearly and with conviction, accord with some of the literature (Gardner, 1956, Fletcher, 1958, Bowlby, 1980, 1988, Read, 2010, Elfer et al, 2012, Roberts, 2010, O'Connor, 2013) and policies (DfE, 2014) related to the topic.

Ana also said that she was “*quite strict and firm*” with the children. It is possible that, for Ana, this feature of her approach was wrapped up in her stated belief that what she did in the present would affect the children in the future.

Ana: I think that, you know, you can't just give them love, love, love and not tell them when they are not right and wrong, and I think that's what I try to do that if the children misbehave or if they are doing something that is not acceptable, you know, we will tell them off.

In this statement, Ana made a distinction between loving children and telling them off. She also said that she guided others to adopt the same stance in their teaching. Some young colleagues, she said, would rather send children to her than say no to them. Ana told me what she might say to her colleagues in such circumstances:

Ana: Don't do that, because that's undermining your role. Because then they know that with you they can do whatever they want because [...] you've got no control over them. You need to say 'No' and not 'I'm going to tell Ana', because it's not fair on the children and not fair on me because you are saying that I am the bad one and it's not fair on yourself as well, your professional development.

Angela also said that love was important for the future, and made reference to this at the start of her interview. She stressed the importance of caring for children “*as learners*” in her opening remarks. This aspect of learning conveys this idea of love for the future.

Angela: You want to see them develop in lots of different ways. You want to see them develop in a kind of academic sort of way but you want to see them grow as people and have the ability to relate to other people and their kind of – self-confidence.



Angela said she kept her focus on children's future development, and this influenced the choices she makes as a professional.

Angela said that she was clear that 'love' also involved "*tell[ing] somebody off*".

Angela: Love or whatever or have a bond which doesn't preclude, doesn't mean you just go "Oh, everything you do is lovely!" It's about – That's part of it. [...] it's helping them understand other people and what's acceptable and why that's acceptable. And I think they understand that too. So I think if you can – [...] if you tell somebody off it hasn't broken the bond that they have got with you.

She said that she wanted children to learn skills for life:

Angela: The thing about warm relations is that they need to be able to deal with going through changes and with ups and downs in them. And, again, that is kind of learning from them, really. They're going to have the same thing at home, really. Family relations are like that. They are not all smooth and simple because, actually, people are – people are not smooth and simple [...] I think that is about learning about life.

So, even though Angela did not use the word love, she said these things in response to my question about love, and therefore clearly associates "*warm relations*", and being with people in good times and bad times, for example, as features of loving relationships. She suggested that just as children learn lessons for the future in the context of their families, so they do in the nursery.

Like Angela, Flori spoke about this at the start of her interview when she said: "*I will love them as if I were the mother, tell them off – you know, and really educate them*". She suggested that she offered love from a maternal more than a professional perspective, and this is explored in more detail in the section on the relationship between love in familial contexts and love in ECEC settings.

Connected to this theme of love as preparing children for the future is the importance of love for children's healthy emotional and social development. Kathleen talked about this in her construction on love in ECEC. Child Development is taught as a subject to aspiring professionals in order that they understand children's needs for emotional expression. Kathleen, for example, said that it was important to attend to children's future emotional development.

Kathleen: It's about the quality of the provision, the love, the demonstrating of that, that makes the children grow.

Kathleen also alluded to the specific challenges that may arise for early years practitioners in primary school contexts as opposed to in dedicated early years settings. She talked about top-down requirements imposed by leaders and inspection bodies.

Kathleen: And I want to go to somewhere like – I have heard of a school – I think it is Swedish. I want to see how they [...] work, without all these phenomenal targets and pushes and drives, because [...] there must be lessons that we could be learning from that, because we have got lost now, and I think it's time now for the leading people in the early years to actually say: "You don't need that type of evidence as a headteacher! That actually, you know, early years is a completely separate way of working. It's not the same as Year 5 [...] You don't have to have those type of targets." I mean, I remember the last time targets were mentioned to me we were told in Nursery and Reception they would only be social target, and that's the important thing. And come September that's what I'm going to do.

Thus Kathleen suggested that in the future she would focus primarily on children's social and emotional development. She talked about a child who had recently experienced the death of a sibling.

Kathleen: "No, she didn't make two levels of progress!" and the inspector was saying "Well: Why not?" "Well, actually because the whole family is in trauma, because she lost her brother, and coming to school, really, is way down the list of her worries at the moment. She is trying to rationalise and work out what's happened – And the impact it's had on all of them." But we're losing that, that whole soul, that whole, that whole – And it is love, actually, when you look at it every time, and that we're not allowed to have time for.

I wrote the poem 'Coming to School' using only Kathleen's words. In July 2014 I attended a workshop led by the poet, Barbara Marsh. She gave me the idea to develop a 'found poem', or a poem that emerges from cuttings of particular texts. I cut up a paper copy of a section of Kathleen's transcript into small pieces, turned them upside down, shuffled them, arranged them randomly, and then made minimal adjustments to create this poem:

## **Coming to School**

*Kathleen's refrain*

Coming to school  
I feel rather saddened  
The impact it has had  
On all of them

That whole, that whole...  
We are being pulled into this

The inspector was saying  
Well... Why not?

Soul destroying  
She lost her brother  
A child lost her brother  
A way down the list

Get on the ladder  
Up they go!

Education is very hard for children  
I feel rather saddened  
Losing that whole soul  
The whole family  
Her worries

And it is love  
Time for love  
Not allowed

Did not make two levels of progress?  
What is wrong?

The poem, I felt, was a fitting way to encapsulate some of the things Kathleen talked about in her interview. It helped me to think about and represent her frustration in relation to love, and to point to some of the reasons for this. (See Section 5.7 of the Methodology chapter for a theorisation of my use of poetry.)

To conclude this section, the participants said that love given by early years practitioners was not just a case of “*love, love, love*”, as Ana said, or about being a

child's friend. In their constructions on love in ECEC, part of loving children was to contribute towards their healthy social and emotional development, and learn the difference between right and wrong, and this might involve being "*hard*", as Hilary said, or telling them off at times, as Ana said.

#### 6.4 Theme 2: Touch as an expression of love

Four of the five participants talked about *touch* in response to my opening question about love. Indeed, this theme of touch is the main way in which the participants linked the notion of love to policy. This emphasis on touch could be as a result of the current fear about touch in England, as discussed in Chapter three. The revised Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2014), for example, called for settings to train staff to look out for "excessive one-to-one attention beyond the requirements of their usual roles and responsibilities" (p.17). Early years practitioners, then, were taught to be on their guard and report any colleagues whom they perceived to be too close to children. Another possible reason why the participants talked about touch in response to my opening question about love was that they thought of touch as the most prominent sign of love in the context of their work. The data do not give a clear indication as to the reason why they talked about touch, but it is interesting that the theme took up such a prominent place in the interviews.

Kathleen and Ana both mentioned the importance of touch in their first interview utterances. Kathleen said that she and her team were "*tangible with the signs of love*", offering hugs when children fall over, for example. Ana said that at her setting the team had permission to show love in the form of hugs.

Sarah: Remember I showed you what the research was about. Really, what I am interested in is how teachers/practitioners feel able to love children in their care. Tell me about it, what your understanding of it is and how you came to it, anything you want, really.

Ana: We are quite lucky where I work because we are able to actually – well of course we don't want to openly – you know – and not having like too many favourite children [...] but we are able to love children in the sense that when children hurt themselves, all they want is a hug.

This response of about being able to hug a child who is hurt could be considered as an act of compassion rather than love. Any human being is likely to rush to help another

human being who is hurt, whether they love that person or not. I argue, however, that, since this was what this participant said in response to my question about love, she constructed compassionate actions such as hugs as part of a suite of actions that were loving.

Kathleen and Ana said that hugs are important when children “*fall over*” (Kathleen) or “*hurt themselves*” (Ana). Ana, however, said that the policies in her nursery imposed restrictions on the extent to which she was permitted to touch children. She said that she and her colleagues were not allowed to have children on their laps, for example. While on the one hand she said: “*We do need to keep our distance*”, on the other she said that children who are away from home for a long time need love in the form of physical touch. As she said, in the context of touch:

Ana: While they are here, they’re with us for a long time as well, and some children are with us from 8 until 6 so they do need that loving because otherwise, you know, for a whole day, they get nothing until they get home, and it’s, it’s just a long time for a three-year-old.

This use of the word “*loving*” by Ana is an example of how she connected it to “*touching*”. This accords with research by Owen and Gillentine (2010) who found that the ECEC practitioners in their study expressed a belief in the importance of touch but said that practice at their settings was dominated by a culture of fear in relation to touch. Powell and Gooch (2012), too, found that safeguarding considerations imposed restrictions on what the ECEC practitioners in their research could or could not do at work.

Kathleen talked about her own childhood experiences of being loved through the expression of touch, for example, “*embraces*”. She did not refer to any restrictions in relation to touch at her setting, and insisted on the importance of showing love in physical ways. “*With small children you have to be that demonstrative,*” she said. Kathleen said that parents were aware that she and her team express love through touch. She also said that most of the people she had ever worked with “*have been happy and confident to be outward going, showing of their – of their love demonstratively to children.*”

Flori, too, talked about her experiences of growing up in a Latin culture where physical contact was acceptable. She also said she was aware of the need to be careful and attend to “*safeguarding issues*” in the context of her work. However, she constructed such restrictions as counter-intuitive:

Flori: If you are trying to be so good and outstanding with the safeguarding, and the safety, and the this – and the this and that, you end up completely tied up in a knot and not being able to do anything with the kids.

Flori said that rigid policies on touch restricted what she felt she could do and this feature caused confusion.

Angela said that there had never been a problem about what sort of touch was appropriate between staff and children at her nursery. “*We’ve never [...] ended up being overly worried about that here,*” she said. She said that too many restrictions, “*create a sort of uncomfortable-ness about being close to children*”.

These four participants all said that touch was important. This resonates with Owen and Gillentine’s (2011) argument that children “need to be loved and cared for through the expression of touch” (p.866). At the same time, Flori and Ana referred to the limits imposed on them by external policies and requirements. This accords with research by Powell and Gooch (2012) who found that “child protection was a significant influence on the physical environment in which they worked” (p.117).

The participants involved in this research were long-standing employees or owners within their workplaces. Their comfortable-ness in relation to physical touch, then, may have grown out of their familiarity with their working environment. They may have developed a habit from the other people they worked with. In other words, they may have gained the courage and convictions, through example and repetition, to act according to their “professional intuition” (Owen and Gillentine, 2011, p.866) or “professionalism from within” (Osgood, 2012, p.131), rather than according to more dominant, neo-liberal discourses. A full discussion about the notion of ‘professionalism from within’ has been put forward in Chapter three.

Hilary was the only participant who did not problematise the issue of touch in her interview. She talked about the importance of hugging children, but she also said that

*“love is not just hugs and kisses”*. I did not prompt any of the participants to talk about touch, and perhaps, in Hilary’s case, the topic simply did not emerge as important to her.

To conclude this section on touch, the five participants all talked about touch and said that they were able to touch the children in their settings. What they said about the need to act in certain ways may have reflected their independence from external directives, gained through sustained experience in the field, or from the fact that they held senior positions in their settings. In other words, the actions they said they engaged in may have derived less from a “professional script” (Osgood, 2012, p.140), and more from their own, “intrinsic” (Osgood, 2012, p.139) ways of being.

### **6.5 Theme 3: Love as natural**

Love as more or less natural in different people featured in all of the constructions. The word ‘natural’ was sometimes used to denote a flair or instinct for the work. This natural approach was also referred to as variable, more or less present in different people. Hilary and Ana gave this idea of love as a natural disposition the strongest emphasis. Indeed, Hilary referred to love as natural in her opening words to me, as illustrated from the first section of the interview transcript:

Sarah: Do you remember? We talked about loving children. Tell me about that, how you interpret that, how you feel allowed to do it.

Hilary: I think it is very much a natural thing in every person, maybe more so in the female sex rather than the male.

Hilary said that she rarely used the word love in her nursery since *“it is generally there in your own persona”*. Hilary’s whole interview was presented through a female lens. She worked within an all-female team and raised her own child with her mother, in the absence of a father or any other male. In the interview she described her experience of having a father as negative. This may have contributed to why she said she thought about loving children as *“more in the female sex”*.

Hilary went on to argue that it is not external qualifications that lead to loving approaches, but innate qualities and natural dispositions.

Hilary: You can check their references and their qualifications. But, again, as I said earlier, when that person goes out onto the floor, if they are naturally good with children, then you know they love children.

In Hilary's construction on love in ECEC, then, love is assessed through people's actions, which are more or less loving. Kathleen, in a similar vein, said that love "*is actually innate in all of us*", although she qualified her position at a different point in her interview as follows:

Kathleen: There are teachers who are natural teachers, and, you know, they have that love – they have the ability to have children work with them. There are others who just don't have it. So there has to be something that's intrinsically in you, or it isn't.

A propensity to love children, then, according to Kathleen, is something that people have to a greater or lesser extent. However, she also said that

Kathleen: Early years practitioners are loving people, because, with small children you have to be that demonstrative, and certainly all the ones that I've come across [...] have been happy to – to work in that way.

And at the very end of her interview she said that to love "*is the nature of an early years practitioner*".

Ana also said that not all practitioners are the same in this regard.

Ana: I appreciate that not everybody is the same and not everyone has got the same levels of patience, caring or loving or whatever we want to call [it], because they don't.

Ana said that love in the context of her work, involved "*patience*" and "*caring*". She talked about how she applied such an approach when settling children into the nursery. She said that this is something some of her colleagues found difficult to do:

Ana: I don't think it is fair on the children to get those members of staff to actually settle them in because I know they are not going to get what they need, because those staff are not able or prepared to invest the time settling them in, so I tend to either give it to staff that I know have got more patience, or if I'm in the room then I'll settle them in.

Ana referred to love as natural. She said that colleagues commented on how easily she settled children into the nursery, and she said: "*I'm just natural when I talk to the children.*" It is possible that Ana applied her "embodied knowledge" (Harwood et al,



2013, p.5), learned through caring for her baby sister since the age of eleven, to her professional role, or that she drew on her “professionalism from within” (Osgood, 2010, p.126) in her relations with children, calling on her inner intuitions based on experience and wisdom.

Flori, too, constructed love as more or less natural in different people. She talked about her former assistant as less loving with children than she would expect:

Flori: The issue that I thought very difficult to approach was the loving relationship with the kids. Never a hug, never a kiss, never a – It was, OK, they need comfort, OK, lifting – and you can see it in the face. You know, no looking in the eye, no “Oh, poor you, come one, give me a hug!” or a hug for a hug, because they need it.

She suggested that this rather distant, clinical approach was her assistant’s way of relating to the children. *“I think that – that was the way she relates to kids – to the children.”*

Thus the interviews showed that Ana, Kathleen and Flori constructed some people as having different capacities for loving children, and that it was more natural in some people than in others.

This idea of loving approaches as natural or not accords with studies by Page (2011) and Page and Elfer (2013) (see Section 3.2.2, Chapter three) who challenged the idea that “attachment work, as a key part of early years pedagogy, can occur in ... [a] natural way” (Page and Elfer, 2013, p.564). As discussed in Chapter two, the notion of attachment is used in the contemporary literature on the topic, and love is not.

To conclude this section on love as natural, the participants constructed their own actions in the workplace as natural rather than derived from external guidelines. They also suggested that some people have a greater capacity for loving children than others.

## **6.6 Theme 4: Love as in ‘love to be with children’**

It was surprising to me that the participants talked about how much *they* loved their work in response to my opening question about love in ECEC. Hilary conveyed the greatest sense of enjoyment for being with children, and mentioned it first in her interview.

Hilary: It was from an early age that whatever path I chose it would be with children. I didn't have a set mind whether it would be a primary school teacher or a nursery manager or some other form, it was just – My school sent me on a course to [...] the path I would take in working with children and I think the natural love was just from deep within. As I say, it was from an early age that I had – It wasn't something that I was taught at school or at college. It was – I genuinely enjoyed being with children, nurturing them, being there for them when they were sad or upset, and having fun with them and just – Even from a very young teenager [...] just seeing all the little quirky things that young children can do, I found enjoyment in that.

Hilary said that she continued to enjoy being with children as an adult. Indeed, her childhood experience of looking after children, she said, “*got [her] to*” the work she did. As she said: “*I've enjoyed every moment of it!*”

Hilary said that when she interviewed prospective members of staff she looked out for a sense of enjoyment in them, which, as she expressed it, was the hallmark of a “*good staff member*”. As part of the selection process, she said, candidates were required to play with the children for two hours.

Hilary: I know when I am employing new staff, I want to see my staff getting involved, getting down and dirty, laughing, giggling, having a bit of a joke.

Kathleen, too, talked about the different aspects of her role that she loved:

Kathleen: Ever since – I don't – I think I loved that whole starting out thing. For me, here – I absolutely loved the whole thing of working with parents.

She went on to say that she liked all aspects of the role:

Kathleen: So, for me, it's the whole package. It's not just the children in here. I – I really like the home visiting, the parents, all that side of things as well.

In their research about intimate relationships between teachers and children, McGimpsey, Kuczynski and Brophy (2011) pointed to this mutually enjoyable aspect of interactions between the two groups. Shin (2010), in her study about friendships between children and ‘caregivers’, noted that the adults “enjoy themselves playing” (301). Boyer, Reimer and Irvine (2012), too, in their research about the landscape of childcare, found “a significant number of very positive emotional experiences on the part of study participants” (p.528). This enjoyable aspect of working with very young children was referred to by four of the five participants who said that they loved to be with the children.

Ana said that she loved working with children. Throughout her interview she repeated that it is what she always wanted to do:

Ana: I always say that I love my job and I love what I do. And I think that – in that sense – because I do. And I always say that if I couldn't teach, if I couldn't work with children I wouldn't know what I would do because this is always what I've always wanted to do and I'm so lucky that I got to do it. And I do always say that I love children. I love working with children and I am passionate about working with children.

Ana told me that she nearly gave up her PGCE training to be a primary teacher, but that as soon as she was placed in an early years class, she knew that she wanted to work with very young children:

Ana: After two days I loved it so much I thought – Actually – This is what I want to do. I want to work with the younger children, just from the beginning, right from the start.

Flori said that being a childminder “*lets me be a mum*”, and that this fulfilled her. She also talked about her enjoyment of being with children:

Flori: I love it, I'm playing with the kids, playing with the kids, painting, singing, we were joking, we were playing.

Ana and Flori both suggested that their work gave them the opportunity to be with children and to satisfy their own emotional needs to an extent. It is interesting that, to some extent, the participants' constructions on love in ECEC appear to be weighted as much on the side of their emotions as on the children's. I wondered whether some of the participants may have secured a career with children to satisfy their own needs in some way. On the other hand, I considered that this is likely to be the motivation for most people when they choose a career, and so there was nothing unusual in this.

To conclude this section, four out of the five participants talked about what they loved about their work with children in response to my question about love. This sense of personal satisfaction gained through the work, though perhaps not surprising since the participants made a career choice to work in early years, was an unexpected feature of the data derived in response to my question about love in ECEC.

## 6.7 Theme 5: Professionals as human beings

In the preceding sections about themes 1-5, I emphasised some of the divergent motives that the participants offered for acting out their roles as early years practitioners in particular ways, for example, in relation to touch. As Deleuze and Guattari (1988) proposed, however, “the signature is not the indication of a person” (p.316), but instead is like a placard or poster marking a territory. In other words, particular approaches in the workplace may serve to point to cultural practices, more than to the individual personhood of the practitioner. In this section I explore the participants’ diverse “style[s]” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p.318) of working, with their unique “refrains” (p.321), more than in accordance to top-down “systems” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p.350).

This notion of professionals as people who engage in loving relationships emerges with different emphases in the interviews. I found it helpful to develop a concept map to identify some of the connections around this theme of professionals as human beings. I identified four sub-themes from the data, connected to this human aspect of the work in ECEC:

1. Professionals as not trying to hide their own feelings and beliefs
2. Professionals as experiencing positive emotions
3. Professionals as experiencing negative emotions
4. Professionals as needing to manage their emotional reactions.

Although, as discussed in Chapter two, emotions are not the same as love, nevertheless, as I showed in relation to the notions of attachment and care, the term emotions is frequently used in ECEC literature where love is not. The five early years practitioners in this study constructed themselves as incapable of carrying out their work from a detached, purely rational stance. Instead, they all talked about the various feelings that arise in their work as human beings in relationships with other human beings.

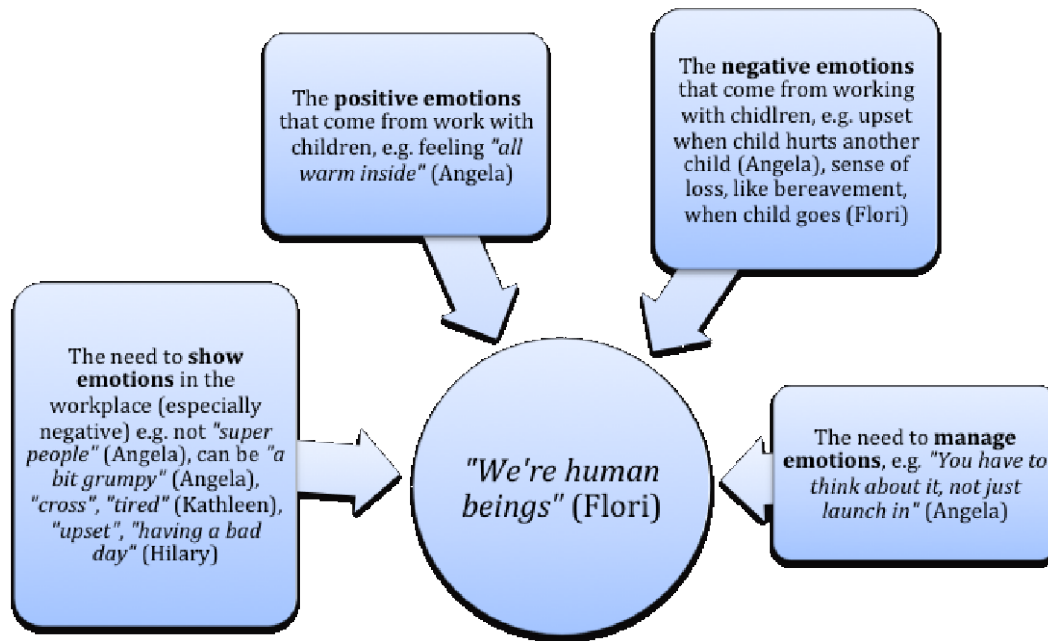


Figure 6-1 Professionals as human beings who engage in loving relationships: a concept map

Figure 6-1 denotes the meanings conveyed within this theme. In the ensuing subsections I discuss each meaning with reference to what the participants said.

### 6.7.1 Professionals as not trying to hide own feelings and beliefs

Ana said, in her opening remarks, that children “*are very sensitive and they know when you are having a bad day.*” Angela, Kathleen and Hilary referred to the idea of practitioners as people who experience ups and downs. Angela talked about being “*a bit grumpy sometimes*”, and Kathleen said she was “*cross*” or “*tired*” on occasions.

Angela said that children accepted the fact that, when she broke her arm, for example she could not perform all the tasks she would normally be able to, and indeed that this was “*quite good for them*”.

Angela: They tolerate you making some mistakes or [...] being a bit grumpy or tired one day.

Hilary said it was important to be honest about her emotions with the children. She said that, even if she were having a bad day, she would not try to hide her own feelings from children.

Hilary: That is an emotion that you have and you have every right to express that emotion and show that emotion, so that when they have that emotion, they know that it's OK to show it and express it.

Thus Kathleen, Angela and Hilary said that it is good for children to see the people who care for them as ordinary human beings with emotions and weaknesses. Being less than “*super people*” (Angela), in other words, is “*OK*” (Hilary) on occasions. This, they said, was important for children's development, and that children, “*do need to see that*” (Kathleen).

### **6.7.2 Professionals as experiencing positive emotions in the context of their work with children**

Angela talked about her own emotional responses in situations when children make significant strides in their learning and development.

Angela: When somebody achieves something who [...] struggled with something, or somebody gets really excited about something, the response to that – There's a feeling where you, you know – It's kind of all warm inside and that's an emotional response rather than a kind of in-your-head response.

Kathleen talked about her positive feelings towards her work:

Kathleen: That's the lovely thing in here that, you know, there is that sense of fun. It is love that's between us all.

This sense of enjoyment and fulfilment, as expressed in different ways by the participants and further discussed in the previous section about the theme of love, as in loving to be with the children. This was also noted by Osgood (2012) who discovered, from her own research about notions of professionalism, that early years practitioners make “positive uses of emotion” (p.137) in their work. In other words, they say they like doing the job they do. Like Osgood's (2012) participants, the participants in this study constructed their working selves as able to be the people they are in their ECEC settings, and to follow a ‘script’ that emanated more from within than from external requirements. In the participants' constructions of love in ECEC, their actions in the workplace could be understood, in Osgood's terms, as “intrinsic to [their] subjective identity formation” (p.139). Their professional performance, in other words, was embedded in their personal subjectivity.

This positive use of emotions in the workplace, proposed Osgood (2012), creates a “counter discourse” (p.137) to Hochschild’s (1983) important notion of “emotional labour”. As discussed in Chapter two, Hochschild discovered that air-hostesses felt drained and found it difficult to relax after a day of being nice to passengers. Hochschild’s notion of ‘emotional labour’, therefore, and in contrast to the constructions in this research, conveyed the negative aspects of working with the emotions.

### **6.7.3 Professionals as experiencing negative emotions in the context of their work with children**

Flori talked about the pain she felt when children left her care:

Flori: Every time, every time one leaves it breaks my heart and, you know, I do a lot of crying, you know, for a couple of hours.

She also said:

Flori: I suffer a lot – mind you – you know – It’s like, when they go, like, my heart, you know, breaks into a million pieces. But you know, I am – I am, let’s say, sad, in that way, I am very sad, because, well, for selfish things, because I am not going to have them.

The emotional aspect of work in ECEC, then, was not always constructed in a positive light. Flori broke down in tears when she said:

Flori: If I can leave on any of the thirty that I have had, that pass through here – If I could leave just a single thing, a song, words, in Spanish maybe, a situation, you know, a memory, then that’s it, I’m done – I’m done, that’s more for me.

These extracts from Flori’s transcript communicated her sense of loss when particular children moved away from her setting.

This emotional moment, as I experienced it in the interview, connected in some way with my own experience as a bereaved mother. This emptiness that Flori expressed reminded me of my own feelings after the death of my third child. I remained in the same house where we had lived together since her birth nine years earlier, and continued to be surrounded by the objects and spaces that reminded me of her. Memories of her lingered in my home space, which served as a constant reminder of her.

This experience helped me to empathise with Flori's particular situation as a stand-in mother working from her own home. I appreciate that feelings associated with the death of one's own child cannot be measured against the departure of someone else's child in one's care. Indeed, Flori said that, when a child leaves, after crying for two hours, she stopped.

Flori: Then I am done, you know. I say: OK. Who is next? You know – I have lost this one, but – Look! This one!

However, the sense of pain and loss felt by an individual in their own home, even though short-lived, I suggest, may not be dissimilar. Certainly, for me, the way in which Flori conveyed her sense of loss resonated with my own trauma and the reality that things would never be the same again. It is possible that this feature of childminders' work, whereby they practise in their own homes, makes their experience of love and sadness when children leave different to the way in which workers in non-domestic institutions experience these emotions.

#### **6.7.4 Professionals as needing to manage their emotional reactions**

Angela talked about feeling upset in cases where children hurt each other.

Angela: I can feel like I don't like that, because [...] it's actually upsetting that somebody's done that and you feel sorry for the person who has been hurt.

She said that, in such instances, she needed to put her immediate responses in check and think what to do.

Angela: That is something where you have to think, step back a bit, because – Sometimes you're – I think it's probably – Look back – It's the same if you – somebody belongs to you [...] that you sort of protect them and say "look" in some sort of way – And you have to think – Well – Look – This is a child doing this and I deal with it in this kind of way, because there's a sort of protecting, is your immediate kind of response. So then you have to [...] think about it, and this person's done this because – You have to think about it a bit, not just launch in.

Angela described what it meant to her to be a thinking human being and a professional. She suggested that she made a distinction between a "*natural*", "*gut instinct*", "*how it feels*" approach, in which "*you are actually operating from somewhere else*", and a more rational, thinking style of pedagogy based on culturally acceptable modes of practice. She said that she found it difficult to cope in situations



when children hurt each other, for example. In these and other emotional circumstances Angela said that she had to “*step back a bit*”.

So, on the one hand, and as Flori said, “*We’re human beings*”, and this, as all the participants conveyed, was a positive aspect about their work. They were able to be themselves, and enter into real relationships with the children and families they worked with. On the other hand, as Angela also said, they needed to “*think*” about their emotional responses, rather than “*just launch in*”. They could be themselves fully and yet they could not. They could apply their “corporeal knowledge” (Bourdieu, 1997, p.135) to their work, and yet at the same time needed to know when to suppress this. They had to manage their hearts and work with their heads when they were in the workplace. In a sense, this dual aspect of working according to heads and hearts is a feature of being human. However, it is particularly pertinent in ECEC contexts in which practitioners are required to behave professionally, and yet they say they also draw on their life-learning and respond as human beings at every moment as they interact with children, families, teams and the wider community.

#### **6.7.5 Conclusion to section about professionals as human beings**

To conclude this section on ECEC practitioners as human beings, four out of five of the participants in this research talked about the human aspect of their work. Angela, Kathleen and Hilary constructed practitioners as people needing to be open with children about their own physical or emotional ups and downs. Angela and Kathleen talked about their own emotional responses to their work with young children. Flori, the childminder, expressed the pain she felt when children leave her care and how she allows herself to feel this for a short period before stepping back into her professional self. Angela talked about the pain she felt when children hurt each other, and, like Flori, said she needed to quickly step away from this emotional response and behave in a professional way. Thus the topic of love in ECEC led the participants to talk about their own emotional responses to the work and how they managed their emotions in the context of their work. Ana is the only participant who did not talk about the human aspects of her work in any of the senses discussed.

## 6.8 Theme 6: The relationship between love in familial contexts and love in ECEC settings

The participants constructed love as familial in some ways and not in others. Angela said that she and her team used words *“like bond or something”*, instead of love. She constructed love as *“more of a charged word. It’s more about family.”* She talked about the relationship she and her team developed with children, and made it clear that this was different to relationships formed within familial contexts.

Angela: It’s not the same as a parent’s relationship because there’s a sort of limit to it, and [...] even though sometimes you think about the children there is a sort of, at this sort of point, a stop in it and then after a year or so they move up and then they move on, and so it’s as though – And again, you sort of sometimes will see the children later and it will be nice to see them again but there are edges to it, sort of boundaries to it.

Love in professional settings, in Angela’s construction, has *“edges”* and *“boundaries”*. It *“has a stop in it”*, she said, and is *“not the same as a parent’s relationship”*. Hilary, a practitioner and a mother, also constructed love as very different in familial and non-familial contexts. She said that being a mother was very different to being a practitioner.

Hilary: Because it is very different from having someone’s child for eight hours of the day, or ten hours of the day if you are doing a full day, to having your own child 24 hours of the day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, not only worrying about their health, their well-being, but clothes, money, food, shelter, education, everything else, is totally different!

In contrast, Flori said she saw her role as more like a mother. Indeed, she said she took on the work because *“it lets me be a mum.”* She referred to the children as her own while they were in her care, and informed parents at their first meeting that *“whenever they cross that door, the kids are mine and [...] I will love them as if I were the mother.”* Flori said that the parents wanted this approach:

Flori: The parents love it here. They want the home environment and they want this for their children.

Flori used the possessive pronoun to describe the children’s connection to her, for example in: *“I was in the playground with [...] three of mine”*. She talked about how she felt other people perceived her in out-of-home contexts such as *“Stay and Play”*.

Flori: I am never the kind of person who [...] grabs a coffee, texts, or [...] the kids run free. I'm always, you know, because I love it. I'm playing with the kids, playing with the kids, painting, singing, we were joking, we were playing, and most of the time. I say this because it wasn't once, it was – on a repetitive time, where people couldn't believe that I wasn't those kids' parents, let us say, that I wasn't their mum, that I was only their childminder.

Flori also talked about the differences between being a mother and a practitioner. She said she reassured a parent when their child did not want to go home at the end of the day: “*You're Mummy and you're always going to be Mummy.*” This affirmation that, despite a temporary rejection by the child, the mother will always maintain the place of the mother, accords with Dalli's (2007) research on societal discourses about mother and teacher identities, in which she found that some teachers and parents perceived themselves in a less powerful role to the other.

I encapsulated this part of the data in a poem. Richardson (1993) wrote a research poem about a woman's life in which she used “only her words” (p.696). I include an extract of Richardson's poem here:

And so I thought I'd have a lot of children.

I lived outside.

Unhappy home. Stable family, till it fell apart.  
The first divorce in Milfrount County.

So, that's how that was worked out. (Richardson, 1993, p.707)

The lines in the poem sound like the unscripted words a person might say when telling their story. Inspired by this piece, I wrote this poem about Flori's expressed longing to be a mother using “only her words” (Richardson, 1993, p.696) from her interview transcript. Like Richardson, I engaged in “writing ‘data’ as a poem” (p.696). So, although I decided to step away momentarily from academic prose, I wanted to remain “faithful” (p.696) to my understanding of what Flori said about *not* being a mother.

**Lets me be a mum**  
*A childminder's refrain*

One of the reasons I chose childminding  
It lets me be a mum

I love it!

Playing  
Singing  
Joking

Lets me be a mum

I love them  
As if I were the mother  
Mother  
I

Love – Equals – Feeling safe – Equals – “I trust you”

Every child is different

I love it!

Flori constructed her role during the day as very much like a parent. However, in her construction, the key difference between her childminder role and that of a mother was that when the children leave her care, and even when the parents keep in touch, her relationship with them is changed.

Flori: But in certain situations the parents are so good, that we keep on, at least, you know, we keep in touch and I can, you know, follow them a bit. It's not the same relationship but Hey Ho it's another kind of relationship and at least, you know, I can see what's going on with them and how they are developing.

It could be argued that the experience of loss after each child leaves was very real for Flori, and served as a recurring reminder to her that the children are not her own.

On the one hand Ana constructed her role as a practitioner as different to that of a parent.

Ana: We do need to keep our distance in the sense that we are not their mums and beyond that, and we're their teachers while they are here.

Ana's comment (discussed in Section 6:4) about not sitting children on her lap also highlights a difference between home and ECEC settings. This links to Page and Elfer's (2013) findings on the differences between close relationships in professional and familial contexts.

On the other hand, however, Ana also talked about the way in which children sometimes see early years practitioners in a parental role. She told me how she

settled a child into the nursery. At first, she said, he would stay by her side, and then...

Ana: Slowly, slowly he got used to all the other teachers and now it's fine. Now he goes everywhere. And he went home and he said to his mum after: "I've got two mummies. I've got Ana mummy at nursery and you my mummy." [...] And that was good. Mum was happy with that.

These words from Ana convey a different position to the one she conveyed when talking about the need to keep her distance in her role as a teacher, and not a parent. In this instance, Ana suggested that she became like a mother to this child. This was the view that, according to Ana, was expressed by the child, and may point to the different perspectives of children and adults.

Angela also talked about parents' satisfaction with the approach at her nursery, where adults adopt a nurturing approach and develop close relationships with the children.

Angela: You could have the potential for people being [...] jealous but I don't really, in my experience here, that's not been the feeling. That, actually, people like and comment on the close connection and they [...] I think the sort of thing about when they bring their child in they like them coming to somewhere where somebody is going to care about them and nurture them and look after them.

Kathleen was the only participant who did not talk about any distinction between familial love and love in ECEC settings. She simply did not raise the topic during her interview. However she did talk about her understanding of love and experience of being loved within her own family in an interview about love in ECEC.

Love in non-familial, ECEC settings, in these participants' constructions, is very different to familial love. Page (2011, 2013b), on the other hand, found that the parents in her research wanted the practitioners to love their children. This accords with Flori's interview, in which she talked about loving the children as if she was the mother. However, as shown earlier in this section, Flori also accepted that as a practitioner she held a different role to that of a mother. Angela's construction, too, resonated with Page's research in that she said practitioners should "*care about [... children] and nurture them and look after them*". Although it may not be possible to associate notions of 'care', 'nurture' and 'looking after people' as necessarily having

the same meaning as love, the fact that Angela chose to say these words in an interview about love suggests that she associated these notions with love.

Some studies, as discussed in Chapter three, affirm these partial connections and differences between love in out-of-home and home contexts. This is affirmed in Ana's interview when she said "*we are not their mums*", and, as Angela and Flori said, children leave their care after a period.

The poem below is my attempt to express the rich data around this theme in a simple, succinct form. I wrote this poem to illustrate some of the tensions and difficulties that my participants talked about. It is a poem in counterpoint, that pulls backwards and forwards, visually and in words, to suggest the divergent tensions and priorities that might call on early years practitioners, especially in relation to the topic of familial and non-familial love.

**Pulled in different directions**  
*A practitioner's refrain in counterpoint*

Like a parent	Not like a parent
Like a home	Not like a home
Valued	Not valued
Allowed	Not allowed
What parents want	Not what parents want
Me	Not me

## **6.9 Theme 7: Childhood experiences of love (or lack of love) and love in the ECEC settings**

All five participants talked about their own childhood experiences and how these, in some way, related to their approach in their ECEC setting.

Kathleen made the strongest connection between her childhood experience of love and her approach in the nursery. She talked about the "*tactile*" approach in her family and a sense whereby "*we would have known that we were loved.*" She also said:

Kathleen: And I think that is probably why I am comfortable with it now. I think as you grow up, so you go on to do.

Kathleen said that she learned how to love from her family, as illustrated in the following comment:

Kathleen: I came from that kind of, mmm, home where we were loved, we were hugged, mmm, physically and mentally probably, and I think that is important.

One possible interpretation is that, since Kathleen experienced demonstrative love in her childhood, she considered it important to re-enact this with the children she cared for.

Flori also made an explicit link between her childhood and her practice when she talked about her experience of growing up in a country where people expressed love and friendship in outwardly physical ways:

Flori: In my country we kiss to say Hello. And, we kiss to express love and we kiss to express acquaintance as well. So the physical contact is not a 'No, No'.

Perhaps Kathleen's and Flori's "professional intuition" (Owen and Gillentine, 2011, p.866) in relation to love developed through the way they said they experienced love as children.

Hilary talked quite extensively about her childhood. She said that her mother tried to protect her and her brother from her own troubles as a wife and mother.

Hilary: You pick up everything. And even if we couldn't see it we could always hear it from upstairs, and if we didn't see what he'd done we saw it the next day when we came down for breakfast, because obviously the black eyes and so forth. So we weren't very naïve children. We knew exactly what was going on. But even then, my mum tried to protect us from that. And, everything was fine and everything was rosy.

Hilary said that these experiences made her strong as a woman:

Hilary: Seeing the relationship my mum had with my dad – It's always – It's made me very strong as a woman. And as much as I found strength in my mum, I also found her very weak.

She also made some connections between what her mother lived with during her childhood and her approach as a mother.

Hilary: I would never have it. I would never have it. So, up to a point, I've used that, more so when my son came along.

She said she applied her learning from her childhood to her approach to parenting, and that all the bad experiences she had as a child, her son "*never had them*".

In the context of her work in ECEC, she constructed her role with parents as very important and made a connection with her experiences as a child. She talked about her work with parents in the nursery, particularly mothers, and said it was important that she be attentive to any domestic issues that they might be experiencing at home, especially since these may remain hidden from social workers.

Hilary: Being approachable so that if parents do have any issues at home they could come and speak to you.

Hilary said she paid close attention to the parents in her nursery and remained alert to any issues that might be causing problems in the home.

Hilary: So when parents come, they just say one little word, and you think: "Mm." And then, you might not approach it then, but you can approach it next time. And [...] picking up on a key word as well. And, again, this helps the children, which is what, for me, my main goal is. Helping the parents and, more so, helping the children.

Hilary talked about her approach with a particular parent:

Hilary: Being able to give her that time and just being a pair of ears, and that – you know, making a cup of coffee for someone is a great, a great start.

She said that this approach allowed her "*to get a lot more information about [...] the child and what is happening in the home life*". She pointed to the fact that the mother might have been in difficulty:

Hilary: It could just be the mum, as for example, us. It wasn't us, it was just my mum, so obviously the social worker never got involved with us because it was all kept hidden behind closed doors, which is still a stigma today.

She said that she would not necessarily have learned about this situation at a home visit or initial meeting with the mother, "*because it is not something you can see*". So, Hilary made the connection between mothers at her nursery and "us", referring to her brother and her, and their situation as children.



In two of the constructions, Angela's and Ana's, the links between childhood experiences and practice in ECEC settings were not explicitly made, and so are tenuous. Angela told me about her experience of playing outdoors as a child and her family's interest in gardening. She said she "*was encouraged to look after things, and take care of them.*"

This life experience may have contributed to Angela's passion for nature and gardening. It may also have contributed to her approach in the nursery:

Angela: There's this sort of ongoing dialogue with the parents. You know, the thing about greeting people in the morning and [...] commenting on [...] little things that you know about them, not – They're not big things on the whole, but there's the bit – "Oh, you know, you went somewhere at the weekend" or that kind of thing, so you're kind of having this conversation that shows, again – It is about being interested in them beyond a narrow "Here's the parent and they just bring the child in."

Sarah: So, little things?

Yes. And little things are important, actually, really important. And if you miss – If you don't let them, you are losing something quite fundamental, I think. So it's really important when the children start – but it becomes an ongoing – So in the morning you [...] need to be available to smile at people and nod at people and even sort of things like at the door I mean when you've got the little one in the buggy going home, that you are kind of making a link with them too, because that's – In the long term, they're coming to you too.

Angela described a slow, nurturing style of love whereby she took the long view, attended to children and families in little ways, on a daily basis. It could be that this in some way connected to her stated disposition for nurturing new life in the context of the natural world. However, no clear connections are drawn in her construction.

Ana, too, talked about her childhood in Lisbon. She told me about how her neighbours in her quarter of the city took on responsibility for teaching her:

Ana: If you needed to be told off, even if they weren't your family, you know, they told you off.

This is possibly reflected in her professional stance whereby she tells children off in her nursery, when necessary, as part of her loving approach. However, as already stated, this is a tenuous link.

Two of the connections I have highlighted above between what the participants said about their childhood and their approach in their settings are my interpretations, and to an extent, therefore, could be construed as tenuous. Furthermore, I am not suggesting that childhood experiences determine what happens to people. As critically discussed in the theoretical chapter, and from a social constructionist framework, people have agency and can break habits. In other words, people are able to draw on their wide social and cultural resources, rather than be inevitably shaped by specific circumstances, as for example, in Hilary's construction. However, I suggest that this connection between childhood experiences and approaches to work was an important feature to focus on in this research about love in ECEC. In my own experience as an early years teacher, I was often reminded about my experiences in childhood. Since 'childhood' was the field in which these participants worked, therefore, I was not surprised that they chose to talk about their own childhood experiences of love.

#### 6.10 Theme 8: Love and training

I asked the participants whether their training had helped them to appreciate the importance of love, or prepared them for the emotional aspects of their work. Four of the five participants said that this was not the case. Kathleen said "*Certainly not*", Angela said "*No*", Ana replied "*Actually, no*", and later "*No, not at all*". Hilary downplayed the importance of qualifications and said "*Not just qualifications because, again, anyone can get a piece of paper*".

Kathleen said that a disposition to love children in professional contexts was not reliant on training, but was natural in some people, and not in others. She said some "*have that love*" and others do not.

Angela also responded quite emphatically to my question about whether her training had prepared her for the role with "*No. I don't think [my training] did [help], really*" and, more, that it "*doesn't prepare you in any way*". Instead, she talked about her continuous learning since she began her work as a teacher. She said that the PGCE training she underwent "*doesn't prepare you in any way, really*".

Angela: It really just touches on so few things. Certainly I think the whole complexity of the job is not apparent until you start, and I think – [...] It is a bit like,

you know, “Oh, you do this and you do that,” and it seems kind of quite clear cut, or, you know, you can read a book about it and it sort of seems straightforward and I think that it becomes (*laughs*) less straightforward and more complicated and then – and then – and almost, not necessarily the more you go on, but I think you have a sort of period when you are learning and it gets more and more complicated and then you get to a sort of point when you still feel – Now. But I think you never stop developing with it and I think that’s good – I don’t think you should. If you got to the point when you think you probably know it all you shouldn’t be doing it any more.

Ana said that her training did not prepare her to love children. In fact, she said she was taught that you should *not* love them.

Ana: Actually, no, because when I did my training it was very – Like – You are not supposed to love children. (*Laughs*) You are supposed to just teach them and, you know, keep your distance, not show any affection, not show any love.

She talked about her experience on a PGCE course. She said she “*nearly gave up. Nearly gave up.*” She said she felt as if she was not allowed to love children, in the sense of offering physical contact.

Ana: And I found that really difficult. I had at the back of my mind while I was training because obviously I didn’t want to fail and I thought, I can’t, especially if I was being observed I knew not to do it. But once I qualified and I started working, it was like, actually, “Who’s to stop me?” If children come to me I can’t really say no. I tried. If a child is crying, you know, I can’t really just leave them there. I sit next to them. “OK?” “Mummy’s coming.” Just reassure them by just giving them a hug. You know, sometimes they just want to hold your hand.

She said that her mentor in school “*did not support me at all*”, and that she had to rely instead on her training and experience as a nursery nurse.

Ana: Luckily, I think for me, that I trained as a nursery nurse beforehand so I already had a bit of experience working with children. Because, all through my degree I’d worked as a nursery nurse too, for an agency, because if I wasn’t teaching, I wasn’t at college, so I’d already had that little bit of experience working with children.

Flori, on the other hand, said that her training and experience as a practitioner reinforced her conviction about the importance of love.

Flori: But through all the training and through my four years of experience as a childminder I came into account (*sic*) that it is impossible, if you want to help children develop and become, you know, and be ready for the big transition that is school, you cannot not love them.

Each of the participants, then, told me about their own experiences of training and learning. Four of the participants affirmed that their training did not help them for the love work they did in their settings. They said that the topic of loving children was not explored or encouraged as part of their training. One participant made a brief mention of her training as a preparation for loving children.

## **6.11 Conclusion**

I have analysed the participants' constructions of love in ECEC in relation to my research questions: What do ECEC practitioners in diverse early years settings say about their role in relation to loving children in their care? What do policies say about love in the context of ECEC? What do ECEC practitioners say about their formal training in relation to loving children in their care? And, what do they say about their informal, life-learning in relation to loving children in their care?

Atkinson (2010) suggested that "narrative inquiry reflects selected interests and representations of teachers' lived experience that are not necessarily representative of every member of the larger teaching community" (p.100). It is not surprising then that what one participant said, another also said with greater or less emphasis, another did not, and yet another said with a different meaning. I welcomed this complex, human feature of the interviews that allowed me to be pulled backwards and forwards in my own thinking on the topic. I developed an intricate patchwork of thoughts stimulated by the diverse constructions of love in ECEC, made by the five participants in this research, who drew on their varied social and cultural resources to do so.

The constructions of love in ECEC were diverse. The participants interwove information about their personal and professional understanding about love. This dualistic feature of their professional identities accords with research by Osgood (2010) in which she exposed "the interconnections between the private and the public, the emotional and the rational, the individual and the collective" (p.122). These interconnections were affirmed by the participants' constructions, in which they referred to their private experiences of being loved and loving, as well as to how they understood love in the context of their ECEC settings. The participants suggested that, on occasions, they turned to their personal understanding of love, as learned

through life, more than to national directives, which, as I have shown, contain minimal reference to love. They also suggested that they acted from their hearts as much as from their heads, from what they *felt* was right, rather than according to top-down standards of practice.

The topic of love in ECEC is not commonly spoken about, and this fact makes it more complicated. As long as love in ECEC remains unspoken, it remains undefined, different in some way to love in familial contexts, with some unwelcome connotations, not the same in every situation, natural in some cases more than in others, and tough at times.

In the next chapter I summarise the research as a whole, offer my reflections and consider the implications of it for future practice and research.

## 7 SUMMARY, REFLECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this final chapter I firstly summarise the findings of this research as they relate to the research questions. I then reflect on the findings, theoretical framework and methodological choices I made. Finally, I consider the implications of this research for future ECEC research and practice. I end the chapter with a conclusion to the thesis as a whole.

### 7.1 Summary of findings

My first question was ‘What do ECEC practitioners in diverse early years settings say about loving children in their care? Much of what the participants talked about served as a response to this question.

All five practitioners talked at length about love in ECEC, with very little prompting from me. However, one of them made very little use of the word love in the course of the interview because she said that love had “*other sort of connotations*”, and, even though my questions referred to love, she explicitly rejected the use of the word, using other terms such as “*emotional link*”, “*bond*” and “*a kind of caring*”.

The five participants said that it was important to love children, because this contributed to their social and emotional development, thus preparing them for the future, helping them to learn to behave, to be ready to move on to school, to grow as people, to gain self-confidence, and to learn. Various examples were put forward of ways of loving children that supported children’s development. One example of this was telling children off, which one participant referred to as “*hard love*”.

Another way the participants talked about supporting children’s development was by showing love in demonstrative ways, for example, by hugging children. They said this was important for children’s healthy emotional development, and to build their self-confidence and sense of self-worth, particularly when they were hurt, upset or in need of reassurance. Four of the participants also suggested that touch was an important element in cultural repertoires of how children are normally treated. This

was more strongly emphasised by the two participants who had grown up in Latin cultures.

Four participants said that in their settings they did not impose any restrictions about touching children, though one talked about the policy requirement where she worked for practitioners not to have children on their laps. They said that to restrict touch was contrary to good practice, and that not touching small children limited their development. Their concern was that, while they understood the need to attend closely to safeguarding issues, they were being required to monitor and limit the ways in which children were touched. They said this went against their instincts both as human beings and professionals. This was clearly important to the participants, and two of them talked about this in response to the very first question they were asked.

The five participants also said it was important that those who worked in ECEC settings should be people who could show love for children, and for whom loving children was “*natural*” and an “*innate*” quality. One participant said that this natural love was “*more so in the female sex*”, where it was in women “*deep somewhere to love children*”. Two of the participants said that different people showed love in different ways and that children sometimes approach adults with whom they felt “*more comfortable*”.

Overall, the participants constructed love in ECEC settings as different from love within families. The key difference they identified was that children were only in ECEC settings on a temporary basis (both in terms of hours of the day, and also years of their lives). However, they pointed out that parents wanted to know that their children were loved while in the care of professionals, or in non-familial contexts. While clearly distinguishing between love in the family and in a work setting, the childminder identified the most similarities between the two, and was explicit that her role let her “*be a mum*” on a temporary basis.

As well as talking about loving children, four out of five of the participants talked about loving *to be with* children. This is a rather different use of the word love, focusing on practitioners’ own emotions rather than on any potential benefits to the children. Three of these participants said that they had chosen to work in ECEC

because they loved to be with children. Related to this, three participants talked about the importance of practitioners showing children their own emotions.

My second question was ‘What do policies say about love in the context of ECEC?’ I attempted to answer Research Question 2 within Chapter two. I found that love has been mentioned hardly at all in policy, and when it has been, only on an intermittent basis. The word love featured in some of the examples of practice within the guidance materials associated with the Early Years Professional Status (CWDC, 2007), for example, but did not feature in the Early Years Teacher Status (DfE, 2013) standards that replaced them. However, I found that some words for concepts associated with love were used: care, attachment and emotions.

None of the participants talked about *national policies* in relation to love in these individual, unstructured interviews. However, they did talk about their *setting policies* in relation to touch. Some said that their policies set limits on appropriate forms of touch, while others said that there were no restrictions imposed on them.

The participant attached to a primary school talked about policy requirements imposed by school leaders and advisers. In her construction of love in ECEC there was a clash between the need to show love to support children’s social and emotional development and the requirement to prepare children for their educational futures with a focus on academic targets. She said it was inappropriate to set targets for literacy and numeracy in the context of early years, for example, if these caused teachers to neglect children’s social and emotional needs. She communicated a sense of feeling oppressed by school and local policy requirements.

My third question was ‘What do ECEC practitioners say about their formal training in relation to loving children in their care?’ The participants constructed their training as not relevant. Four out of five of them said that their training contained nothing about love. In the one case where the participant said her training *did* mention love, this was only in a negative sense. Although Ana, the participant in question, trained as a primary and early years teacher rather than a specifically early years practitioner, she said her training emphasised the need for professionals to maintain a distance between themselves and the children in their care.



My fourth question was ‘What do ECEC practitioners say about their informal, life-learning in relation to loving children in their care?’ The participants answered Research Question 4, to an extent, when they talked about their own childhood experiences of love (or lack of it). Three of the participants made the connection between their formative life experiences and their approach in their settings. One said that “*as you grow up, so you go on to do*”. Another talked about growing up in a Latin culture where people embrace and kiss each other in a range of contexts to express a range of sentiments. She made the link between this and her practice where “*physical contact is not a No No*”. Another made a connection between her work with vulnerable families and her own experience of growing up in one. Beyond these examples, the participants did not explicitly make many links between their informal life-learning and love in the context of their work.

To summarise this section about research findings in relation to research questions, my research questions were answered differently in the different constructions of love in ECEC, and there were a number of common themes. My first research question was answered to a great extent within the interviews; the second one was answered mainly in my review of the literature and to some extent in the interviews; and the third and fourth questions were answered briefly in the interview. This briefness was illuminating in itself, since what the participants left out of their constructions was indicative of the social and cultural resources they drew on in their respective contexts. In other words, since the participants’ training programmes did not cover love as a topic or encourage them to draw on their informal, life-learning, they did not elaborate on these points.

## **7.2 Reflections on findings**

Having presented a summary of the findings I now reflect on what I found particularly interesting or surprising from these. I was interested that the participants

1. Were willing to talk about love in ECEC;
2. Did not talk about policy; and
3. Talked about their own experiences of being loved.

I was interested, but also particularly surprised that the participants

4. Talked about touch in response to my question about love; and
5. Talked about what they love about their work in ECEC.

I was also interested to discover that

6. Love featured more prominently in earlier educational literature than in the literature from the mid to late twentieth century.

I go through each of these reflections in turn in the ensuing paragraphs.

Firstly, I was interested that the participants talked about love and appeared interested and engaged by the topic. The interview transcripts (an example of which is included in Appendix 2) show that participants elaborated on the topic with minimal prompting. (See introduction to the data analysis chapter in Section 6.1.) Their constructions suggest that the topic of love in ECEC served a useful trigger for reflecting on their practice in general. They discussed wide-ranging features of their practice in relation to the topic of love, from working with parents to organising snack bars, from meeting wider institutional requirements to taking children on local outings.

Secondly, the fact that the participants talked so little about policy was also of interest. This was perhaps indicative of how unimportant or irrelevant they considered the wider national picture to be in relation to the topic of love. In general terms, they did not regard policy as supportive of loving relationships.

Thirdly, the five participants talked about their own experiences of being loved (or not) as children, and while only three of them made links between their childhood experiences of love and their practice in their settings, the interview about love in the early years triggered this association for all of them. In Chapter four I emphasised that I did not adopt a determinist, cause and effect stance, such that people's life experiences influence or shape their lives in the future. From the social constructionist perspective I chose, and as my analysis of the five constructions showed, the participants talked about their life learning in their constructions on the topic. They talked about what they did as ECEC practitioners and how they constructed this, if necessary, in stark contrast to their childhood experiences.

Fourthly, I was surprised that four participants talked about touch in response to my question about love. In their constructions, they also used other words to denote physical demonstrations of love in ECEC, such as “*hug*”, “*embrace*” and “*kiss*”, and said that such outward, physical expressions of love were important for children’s healthy psychological development. They talked about the extent to which they felt touch was appropriate, or to what degree they were permitted to touch children in their settings. The surprising feature is that love is not the same as touch, and vice versa. Love may be expressed through touch, though not in every instance. When practitioners hug children, for example, they may be acting ethically, or responding to human need in a caring way, and this may not necessarily involve love.

As Elfer (2012) and Goouch and Powell (2013) have shown, and as discussed in Chapter three, practitioners may be supported through opportunities to talk openly about different aspects of their work in ECEC. Accordingly, and from the social constructionist perspective adopted, touch may have been a topic these participants wanted to talk about.

Fifthly, I was surprised that the participants talked about what they loved about their work in response to my question about love in ECEC, thus applying a different definition of love to the one I identified as most relevant for this study. In the introduction I suggested that, for the purposes of this research, love meant to have a great attachment to and affection for another person, and that this could be quite intense at times, with feelings of real warmth and fondness towards the other person. Nevertheless, the participants constructed love, in part, as love for their work.

Finally, I was also interested that, until around the mid to late twentieth century, love featured quite frequently in some studies about education and the early years. Currently, by contrast, there are far fewer references to love. Possibly this reflects the neo-liberal context in which ECEC practitioners are required to perform to professional standards, meet measurable targets and be accountable in terms of outcomes, and love does not fit into this.

### **7.3 Reflections on the chosen theoretical framework**

I have found social constructionism a useful theoretical framework to clarify the distinctions between what people think, say and do. From a social constructionist perspective, there was no way I could correlate what the participants said with their thinking or how they carried out their practice. Within this framework, therefore, I understood that I could not research thoughts, but only what people said or did. In this thesis I chose to research what people said.

From a pragmatist stance this accorded with the position whereby the world out there is made by the people who perceive it, act in it and talk about it. Bochner (2014) wrote that there is nothing beyond what people say, and, as Foucault (1972) argued, we can only know things by people's descriptions of them.

### **7.4 Reflections on research design**

Having summarised and reflected on the research findings and theoretical framework adopted, I now go on to reflect on the research design. I consider whether the methodological approach I adopted and choices I made were appropriate or fit for purpose. I consider the merits of what I chose to do in relation to the following:

1. Choice of participants;
2. Choice of interview approach; and
3. Approach to data analysis.

I then explore what I might have done differently, and what the possible advantages as well as disadvantages of these choices might have been. I also consider how the choices I made may have affected the outcomes of this research.

#### **7.4.1 Choice of participants**

As discussed in the methodology chapter, I selected participants who were in leading roles and represented a range of types of setting. I firstly discuss the merits of making these choices, and then consider what I might have done differently.

My decision to select participants in leading roles was important. They were all in a position to influence others, so their constructions were particularly important. They

also had plentiful experience to draw on. It is true that even newly qualified practitioners would have something to say about love in ECEC, but they would not be in a position to influence others. New practitioners would still be developing as practitioners, so their constructions would be of less interest.

My decision to select participants representative of a broad range of settings was also important since they would draw on a variety of resources in their constructions of love in ECEC. The participants constructed love in ECEC from their different perspectives. The childminder's construction, for example, clearly related to the form of work she did in her home. The participant in a primary school, too, talked about constraints on loving children imposed by school pressures. These varied perspectives from practitioners in different types of settings were valuable. Had I chosen any team member or restricted my interviews to one setting, I argue, the constructions would have been less interesting.

There were potential weaknesses in my choice of participants too. When I selected the participants, I failed to consider their particular family circumstances, for example, whether or not they were parents themselves. As it turns out, this became quite a dominant feature. The childminder participant, for example, took on this work because she was not a mother, and wanted the opportunity to be like a mother to the children she cared for. This feature of parenthood and practice gained importance as the participants referred to it, or drew on their experiences of being parents, or not, in their constructions on the topic. However, just because one participant talked about her desire to be like a mother, I could not assume that other non-parent practitioners would say the same about love in ECEC.

Another thing I might have done differently was to interview a larger sample of participants. This would have inevitably produced more constructions for me to analyse, and thereby produced different findings. Of course, just because I might have interviewed more people does not mean that I would have arrived at a richer or more valuable bank of data. Additionally, I might have lost some of the depth I was able to reach.

Another choice I might have made differently was to represent both genders within the sample. This would have been beneficial since I would have had the perspective

of one or more males to analyse alongside the female constructions. On the other hand, and as I have argued in relation to the case of parent and non-parent participants, I would not have been able to draw any conclusions or make any generalisations about specifically male constructions. This is because the data would only represent the construction of the male or males in the sample.

On reflection, I might have planned the second visit to the participants in such a way as to make more effective use of it. The advantage of this would be that I would have had a further layer of data to enrich the data I already had. However, the fact that this second visit was more informal, with no recording, allowed me to tell the participants how I was working with their interviews. It was also an opportunity for me to thank them for what they had given me, so the second visit was not wasted.

#### **7.4.2 Choice of interview approach**

In general terms, I found there were benefits to adopting a narrative interview approach. Firstly, the approach helped me to elicit constructions on the topic of love in ECEC. Secondly, it allowed the participants the opportunity to speak freely about the topic, their lives and their work, and offer their individual perspectives with minimal prompts, drawing on their diverse social and cultural resources.

I considered whether, had I carried out semi-structured interviews, there might have been potential benefits. Such an approach would have enabled me to ensure that every interview covered all the key areas, for example. However, there would also have been disadvantages to adopting a more structured interview approach. An approach such as that would have offered much less information about what the participants themselves identified as important or interesting, and so would have ended up being closer to my own construction of love in ECEC than to theirs.

#### **7.4.3 Approach to data analysis**

My choice to adopt a flexible approach to research was beneficial. Within such an approach it was possible to apply different methods or adopt different approaches to those originally planned, in order to strengthen the interpretive process. I came to appreciate the importance of focusing my efforts on analysing the transcripts. I realised that there was a danger in focusing more strongly on my own interpretations of what the participants said, and that it was crucial that I allowed the participants'

own voices to emerge. I became aware that the participants' own words were highly appropriate material to include as often as necessary within my research writing. As Sikes (1997) prompted me to appreciate, "by needlessly changing words and phrases I was distorting what people really wanted to say at the time that they said it" (p.94). Accordingly, I wove sections of the transcripts into the data analysis chapter as often as I judged this would enhance the meaning of the research for the reader.

By finally choosing to carry out a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), I was able to focus very closely on the five participants' constructions of love to identify, analyse and report on themes or patterns within the data. Through the analytical process, I learned the importance of paying deep attention to the data themselves, or the participants' constructions of love in ECEC, and organising the material in a meticulous fashion.

I reflected whether, had I carried out a discourse analysis (Flick, 2014) instead, I might have focused more on how my particular style of questioning might have influenced the participants' responses. Additionally, I might have gleaned more about the different discursive resources drawn on in the constructions of love in ECEC. However, I was interested in *what* the participants said about love in ECEC rather than *how* they said it. My thematic analysis helped me to focus on the content of their constructions.

#### **7.4.4 Conclusion to 'reflections on research design' section**

In this section I have reflected on my research design, whether the choices I made were appropriate, and what the implications might have been had I made different choices. Over and above these specific points, engaging in this research helped me to understand research differently. I learned the importance of attending closely to the data and linking all findings directly to it. I came to appreciate the importance of developing my own research space within the literature and adopting a critical stance. These new skills will support my future work as a university lecturer and scholar.

#### **7.5 Implications of ECEC practice and research**

In this section I consider the implications of this research firstly for ECEC practice, and then for future research. If, as the participants suggested, love supports children's

social and emotional development, then it might be helpful for practitioners to consider how it is appropriate to show children in ECEC settings that they are loved. The participants in this research argued that touch was an important way of demonstrating love to young children, but the moral panic about paedophilia has resulted in some confusion about what sort of touch is acceptable. Thus open discussions among practitioners may be helpful. This would provide forums for talking about ways in which they can demonstrate to children that they love them without being accused of inappropriate behaviour, for example.

If, as the participants reported, some ECEC practitioners do not show children that they are loved, and this is interpreted as a weakness in their practice, could they be helped and supported to undertake this aspect of their role better? Possibly initial training should include content about the importance of loving children and showing them that they are loved. Additionally, professional development, in the form of opportunities to talk explicitly about practice, as found in research by Goouch and Powell (2013), could support such enhancements of practice.

One practical way in which I could drive this emphasis on love forward is by disseminating the findings of this research and other research about love to practitioners. A possible approach would be to draw up a practical guide for trainees and other practitioners including managers and leaders. The guidance would be strengthened with reference to theory, cross-cultural perspectives and research.

The fact that, in research by Page (2011, 2013b), parents emphasised the importance of love in ECEC and, as I have shown in this research, practitioners do too, and yet love is mentioned very rarely in policies and current literature on the topic, leads me to argue that researchers should pay greater attention to the role of love in ECEC.

Over the centuries leading thinkers have asserted the importance of love in education. In Lawrence's (1970) study of the history of Western education, for example, she illustrated how love featured in the ideas put forward by many educational thinkers through the ages. Love in early childhood was a significant topic for philosophical discussions by Russell (1926) in the late 1920s. Love was mentioned in academic books about different aspects of early years pedagogy (de Lissa, 1949, Gardner, 1956, Fletcher, 1958) in the mid 1900s. By the late 1960s, however, some literature



(Winnicott, 1964, Langford, 1968) suggested that love was less appropriate in professional contexts. Currently the word features rarely, while the concepts of care, attachment and emotions are used more widely. Love is hardly mentioned in policy or training either. My research shows that these practitioners regard love as important, and Page's (2011, 2013) research shows that parents regard it as important. Arguably, therefore, this is something that should be discussed.

To develop this, one of my longer term aims would be to carry out a thorough review of historical references to love in education, both in literature and policy. Such a study would consider the wider resources drawn on, including historical, philosophical, ideological, geographical and religious resources. Some of the earlier writings on the topic may be re-enlivened and re-considered with reference to current policies and contexts.

It might also be beneficial to carry out future research studies about love in ECEC on a larger scale, with a bigger sample. This would be more likely to include participants who perhaps, for example, do not easily show love to children. It would be interesting to analyse such constructions and disseminate findings to the research community.

Related to this point, it might also be valuable to do some international, cross-cultural research to build on research by Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2007), Degotardi and Pearson (2009) and Dencik (1989), who found that relationships in ECEC settings are quite different from familial ones. It would be interesting, for example, to carry out research about love with ECEC practitioners in Denmark, where Dencik's (1989) research took place, and find out whether their constructions would be significantly different from those found in this research. In order to bring this about, I could, in the first instance, arrange to attend and present a paper on love in ECEC at an early years conference in Denmark. This would be an opportunity to make contacts, and organise visits to early years settings.

## **7.6 Conclusion to chapter**

In this chapter I summarised the findings from this research, reflected on these as well as on the theoretical framework I adopted and the methodological choices I made.

Finally I considered the implications of this research for ECEC practice and further studies.

## **7.7 Conclusion to thesis**

I did this research partly because, as a practitioner, I loved the children I taught, and believed that this was a key aspect of practitioners' relationship with children. I was also interested in the emergence of recent research about love (Page, 2011, 2013), particularly when policies and current research literature say so little about it. I found it encouraging that the practitioners I interviewed shared my perspective about the importance of love in ECEC, and hope that, although love gets little attention today as an aspect of early years practice or as a focus for research, my research will contribute to the importance of love in ECEC being more widely recognised and celebrated.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix 1 – Identification and sorting of themes

### Recurring themes – 14<sup>th</sup> April 2014

Theme	Hilary	Ana	Angela	Flori	Kathleen
Love with limits/boundaries – not the same as familial love	✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓
Professionals as people – importance of sharing fact that they may be having a bad day	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tough/hard/good love – for the future	✓	✓✓✓✓	✓		✓
Love – love being with children	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓		✓✓	✓
Important for healthy child development	✓	✓	✓		✓
Importance of touch		✓	✓	✓	✓
Dilemma – corporeal knowledge v. restrictive policies		✓	✓	✓	
Love as natural	✓✓✓	✓✓			✓✓
Emotional labour			✓✓✓✓	✓	✓
Professional love not the same as familial love	✓		✓		
Professional love like familial love				✓	✓
No training for love	✓	✓			
Parents want practitioners to love their children		✓✓	✓		
Children as giving love		✓	✓		
Burden of regulatory requirements – heavy workload				✓✓	✓✓✓✓
Strategies for love, e.g. transitions		✓	✓		
Love as ‘care’	✓		✓		
Love as a ‘bond’			✓	✓	
Complexity of role		✓✓	✓✓		
Love as different with every child				✓	✓
Children like practitioner’s own children		✓		✓	
Isolation			✓	✓✓	
Cultural differences			✓✓	✓✓✓	
Outdoors	✓			✓	
Important for teams to model good relationships			✓✓		✓
Attachment theory	✓	✓			
Importance of continuity			✓		✓
Love learned from mother	✓✓				

### Recurring themes – 18<sup>th</sup> April 2014

Theme	Hilary	Ana	Angela	Flori	Kathleen
Love with limits/boundaries – not the same as familial love	✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓
• Professional love like familial love				✓	✓
• Children like practitioner's own children		✓		✓	
Professionals as people – importance of sharing fact that they may be having a bad day	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Emotional labour	✓		✓✓✓✓	✓	✓
Love as natural	✓✓✓	✓✓			✓✓
• Dilemma – corporeal knowledge v. restrictive policies		✓	✓	✓	
• No training for love	✓	✓			
• Cultural differences			✓✓	✓✓✓	
• Love learned from mother	✓✓				
Tough/hard/good love – for the future	✓	✓✓✓✓	✓		✓
• Important for healthy child development	✓	✓	✓		✓
• Attachment theory	✓	✓			
• Importance of mental hugs					✓
Love – love being with children	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓		✓✓	✓
Importance of touch		✓	✓	✓	✓
• Love as visible, demonstrative					✓
Complexity of role		✓✓	✓✓		
• Professionals as less important than mothers				✓	
• Love as time-limited				✓	
• Isolation			✓	✓✓	
• Pain of separation				✓	
• Burden of regulatory requirements – heavy workload				✓✓	✓✓✓✓
Parents want practitioners to love their children		✓✓	✓		
Definitions of love					
• Love as 'care'	✓		✓		
• Love as a 'bond'			✓	✓	
• Love as 'protection'/not protection	✓				
• Love as 'comfort'		✓✓			

### Recurring themes – 19<sup>th</sup> April 2014

Theme	Hilary	Ana	Angela	Flori	Kathleen
Love with limits/boundaries – not the same as familial love	✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓
• Professional love like familial love				✓	✓
• Children like practitioner's own children		✓		✓	
Professionals as people – importance of sharing fact that they may be having a bad day	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Emotional labour	✓		✓✓✓✓	✓	✓
Tough/hard/good love – for the future	✓	✓✓✓✓	✓		✓
• Important for healthy child development	✓	✓	✓		✓
• Attachment theory	✓	✓			
• Importance of mental hugs					✓
Love – love being with children	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓		✓✓	✓
Importance of touch		✓	✓	✓	✓
• Love as visible, demonstrative					✓
Love as natural	✓✓✓	✓✓			✓✓
• No training for love	✓	✓			
• Cultural differences			✓✓	✓✓✓	
• Love learned from mother	✓✓				
Complexity of role		✓✓	✓✓		
• Dilemma – corporeal knowledge v. restrictive policies		✓	✓	✓	
• Professionals as less important than mothers				✓	
• Love as time-limited				✓	
• Isolation			✓	✓✓	
• Pain of separation				✓	
• Burden of regulatory requirements – heavy workload				✓✓	✓✓✓✓
Parents want practitioners to love their children		✓✓	✓		
Children as giving love		✓	✓		
Love as different with every child				✓	✓
Love as different with every adult					✓
Love as 'care'	✓		✓		
Love as a 'bond'			✓	✓	

### Recurring themes – 20<sup>th</sup> April 2014

Theme	Hilary	Ana	Angela	Flori	Kathleen
Love with limits/boundaries – not the same as familial love	✓✓	✓	✓✓✓	✓	✓
• Professional love like familial love				✓	✓
• Children like practitioner's own children		✓		✓	
Professionals as people – importance of sharing fact that they may be having a bad day	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Emotional labour	✓		✓✓✓✓	✓	✓
Tough/hard/good love – for the future	✓	✓✓✓✓	✓		✓
• Important for healthy child development	✓	✓	✓		✓
• Attachment theory	✓	✓			
• Importance of mental hugs					✓
Love – love being with children	✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓		✓✓	✓
Importance of touch		✓	✓	✓	✓
• Love as visible, demonstrative					✓
Love as natural	✓✓✓	✓✓			✓✓
• No training for love	✓	✓	✓		
• Cultural differences			✓✓	✓✓✓	
• Love learned from mother	✓✓				
Love for the wider family	✓		✓		✓
Complexity of role		✓✓	✓✓		
• Dilemma – corporeal knowledge v. restrictive policies		✓	✓	✓	
• Professionals as less important than mothers				✓	
• Love as time-limited				✓	
• Isolation			✓	✓✓	
• Pain of separation				✓	
• Burden of regulatory requirements – heavy workload			✓	✓✓	✓✓✓✓
Parents want practitioners to love their children		✓✓	✓		
Children as giving love		✓	✓		
Love as different with every child				✓	✓
Love as different with every adult					✓
Love as 'care'	✓		✓		

Recurring themes – Contradictions – 13<sup>th</sup> May 2014

Theme	Hilary	Ana	Angela	Flori	Kathleen	Frequency participants, times mentioned + Notes
• Related or contrasting sub-theme						
Tough/hard/good love – for the future	✓✓✓ Strong emphasis	✓✓✓ Strong emphasis	✓✓✓ 1 <sup>st</sup> paragraph 1 <sup>st</sup> mention Strong emphasis Linked to child development	✓✓ 1 <sup>st</sup> paragraph Educate children Children will have good memories	✓✓ Clear expectations Children know boundaries Fairness Linked to child development	5/23 Different in Flori's transcript Ana – separation between tough love and child development
• Important for healthy child development	✓	✓✓✓ Children need hugs if away from home all day Children need love	✓✓✓		✓✓	
• Importance of mental hugs					✓	
• Attachment theory	✓	✓				
Love as natural in some people	✓✓✓✓ 1 <sup>st</sup> mention 1 <sup>st</sup> paragraph Natural in some people Reason for choosing work Linked to	✓✓✓✓ Love as natural Linked to early career choice Natural to need love Natural in some people more than	✓✓✓ Working on the basis of how things feel, gut instincts Distinction between immediate and in-your-head responses (Osgood, 10)		✓✓ Innate, intrinsic in some people Natural to show demonstrative love	3/14
Importance of touch		✓ Joint 1 <sup>st</sup> mention 1 <sup>st</sup> paragraph Restrictions imposed by policy	✓✓ No restrictions All comfortable with it Knows it is important through wider reading Strong emphasis	✓	✓✓✓✓✓ Joint 1 <sup>st</sup> mention 1 <sup>st</sup> paragraph Strong emphasis Tangible, physical, demonstrative love	4/9
Professionals as human beings – importance of sharing fact that they may be having a bad day	✓ Last paragraph 3 <sup>rd</sup> importance	✓ 1 <sup>st</sup> paragraph 1 <sup>st</sup> mention (Children will be sensitive to this and give a hug)	✓ Strong emphasis	✓ Human beings	✓ As in 'fallible'	5
• Linked to emotional labour and complexity of role			✓✓✓✓ Emotional response			
Love with limits/boundaries – not the same as familial love	✓ 3 <sup>rd</sup> importance In relation to own parenthood	✓ 2 <sup>nd</sup> importance Imposed by policy	✓✓✓ 1 <sup>st</sup> mention 1 <sup>st</sup> paragraph			3/5
• Professional love like familial love				✓	✓	2 In contradiction to them of love with limits
• Children like practitioner's own children		✓		✓		In contradiction to them of love with limits
Love for the wider family	✓		✓		✓	

Children as giving love		✓	✓			
Love as different with every child				✓	✓	
Love as different with every adult					✓	
Love as 'care'	✓		✓			
Love as a 'bond'			✓	✓		
Love as warm relations			✓			
Love as for love for life			✓			
Love as an 'emotional link'			✓			
Love as 'protection'/not protection	✓					
Love as 'comfort'		✓✓				
Love as nurture			✓		✓	
Importance of patience		✓				
Importance of respect			✓			
Importance of trust				✓		
Leadership		✓				
• Strategies for love, e.g. transitions		✓	✓			
Outdoors	✓			✓		
Important for teams to model good relationships			✓✓		✓	
Importance of continuity			✓		✓	
Attending to little things			✓			

## Appendix 2 – Example of an interview transcript

### Hilary's interview transcript

*Sarah: Do you remember? We talked about loving children. Tell me about that, how you interpret that, how you feel allowed to do it.*

Hilary: I think it is very much a natural thing in every person, maybe more so in the female sex rather than the male. Obviously as we are from a very young age brought up by our mums to nurture each other, nurture our younger siblings, nurture our cousins or neighbours' children and so forth, but I think as a female it is in us deep somewhere to love children. And I think for me, choosing this path of my job, it was from a very, very early age I was a person who looked after all the children where we lived and was the local babysitter and was always the one people trusted to keep them, have their children with. And it was from an early age that I did decide that whatever path I chose it would be with children. I didn't have a set mind whether it would be a primary school teacher or a nursery manager or some other form, it was just - My school sent me on a course to, you know, to the path I would take in working with children and I think the natural love was just from deep within. As I say, it was from an early age that I had. It wasn't something that I was taught at school or at college, it was - I genuinely enjoyed being with children, nurturing them, being there for them when they were sad or upset, and having fun with them and just - Even from a very young teenager, you know, just seeing all the little quirky things that young children can do, I found enjoyment in that, and I think that is where it got me to.

*Sarah: That's interesting. You are using words like 'enjoyment'. That's important. You also said it was 'the path'. Tell me about that word, 'the path' -*

Hilary: The path? Well I think, as I say, I knew from a very early age that I wanted to work with children, and as soon as I could, mmm, you know, I think the law was then that at 13 you could be babysitting. By the time I was 13 I was setting up my own business card and I'd given them all to the neighbours, and, you know, if they wanted a babysitter, I was quite happy to do it and this is how much I charged. And I was used quite a lot locally, you know, during the summer holidays, you know, to look after - I used to go around about five or six children during the summer that I would



take to the park all together with other children in our building, and I'd be the responsible person who would make sure that these children had water, had food, were OK, if they were crying I'd mop up their knees and take them home and very much be nurse to them as well. And even after my GSSEs I'd looked at courses or my sort of A' Levels that would take me to becoming a primary school teacher, whether it be in a primary school or in a secondary school. If I had gone to secondary school I'd probably be teaching history, in all honesty, because I did like, I still like history. But the path that it took me on was that - Unfortunately, the course that my school was providing was a Health and Safety course, actually fell through. There was only twelve of us that wanted to do it when really then needed thirty. So for a little while I actually did a different job. But as soon as I thought, well, I am either going to go and stay within this job that was in the entertainment industry, well, working in a pub and so forth I need to take back my life. And I looked at courses that I could go on, back into working with children. The course that I found that I thought I could do at that particular time was Early Years, so obviously I did my NVQ Level 2, followed by my Level 3, to my management. And so that, you know, it is the path that it took me on. And I've enjoyed every moment of it!

*Sarah: Sounds like from a very young age you were on that path, and you found your way back again....*

Hilary: Yeah. Your life throws different spanners in the works and for a little while, yes, I did go off track, and I feel that I came back.

*Sarah: You had an idea what you wanted -*

Hilary: Yes. That was then I was 13, and obviously, 15, 16, boys come on the scene, and, you know, then the babysitting wasn't so interesting as much, so that went off. But then it sort of came back. I thought, you know, 'Where do I want to go with my life? What do I want to do: What do I really want to do?' And obviously you do sort of sit back and think: "What did I want to do when I was little?" "What was my childhood dream?" You know, some people are astronauts, dentists, doctors, horse riders, gymnasts, ballerinas. I had always wanted to in some way work with children. And yes, I probably – I can't remember doing it, but my mum says she remembers that when I was in the role play area in my nursery I was very much doing the register

as what I would see children doing now. So it is funny how that circle has come round, the way I -

*Sarah: Interesting, isn't it? And you are still living with your mother and she can reflect back...*

Hilary: She can -Yeah. I can talk to her about things that I did. And, you know, if a child had an imaginary friend here, my mother always brings up: "Well you had Sammy!" Sammy was my imaginary friend who I had to set – My mum had to set a dinner table for Sammy, and Sammy had to have their own food and Sammy had to have a drink, and if I was cold, Sammy was cold and my mum would always have to find Sammy a jumper. Even if it just sat on the table, it was there if Sammy really wanted it, you know, it's those sorts of things. It's great. I think my mum has been the greatest teacher in how to help and work with children.

*Sarah: It sounds as if she was quite attuned to your needs as a child, which helped.*

Hilary: Yes, definitely. I think so. When you sit back and look at it, my mum has always been very much a listener. She's never been a repressor, or, you know, if you believed in something she's gone along with you and worked with you and sort of encouraged you to carry on.

*Sarah: Lovely, that's nice. So, you're talking a lot about looking after, you know, if they fall and hurt their knee, the nursing side of things. But you also use the word 'deep within'. That seems to more of a feeling than an action. Does that come into it at all?*

Hilary: I think it is - I suppose the only way I could relate to this is the lioness protecting their cubs. If your cub felt scared, you'd feel scared. If your, when your cub is happy, you are happy, and when they've hurt themselves you just want to make them feel better. So I do think it is very much a protection thing and keeping them safe and making them feel safe as well, and secure.

*Sarah: And it's something you've had from a very young age -*

Hilary: Yes. On a personal note, I think my mum had been my safety net. It wasn't a great upbringing that I had. It was very violent and turmoil through drinking and violence. And, not from my mum, but from my father. But my mum has always tried to protect me and my brother from that, tried to make sure that we didn't see it. As

children, of course, they think – Yeah, you pick up everything. And even if we couldn't see it we could always hear it from the upstairs, and if we didn't see what he'd done we saw it the next day when we came down for breakfast, because obviously the black eyes and so forth. So we weren't very naïve children. We knew exactly what was going on. But even then, my mum still tried to protect us from that. And, everything was fine and everything was rosy, and, you know, "We still have the family unit, which is lovely!" So: "Your dad is still here. Mum is still here. We've got upstairs, downstairs, 2.4 children." When in theory -

*Sarah: So, she did the lioness thing?*

Hilary: She did. She tried to protect us. And as much as we probably did feel protected knowing our mum was there, we weren't silly enough to know - We knew what was going on, you know. More so as we got older. Maybe not so much as very young children, but as we started to realise that what we knew that our father wasn't the person we could go to. We knew that our mother was the one that we could go to, that would protect us, who would make us feel safe, secure. She was the person who gave us love, and showed me, probably showed me how to give love as well to others. And it might even be why I feel so protective over children as well, because, up to a point, even though it was a very sad upbringing it was also a really great upbringing, because we were, we were in a situation with my dad, it was, the quicker we got out of the house and out to play, then if he woke up in a bad mood, we wouldn't be there to upset him. So we had a lovely back - The building we lived in had sixteen families and we had a lovely back door area where we could play. So, literally, we would get up, get washed, have your breakfast and then it was out 'til tea time. And it was, yeah, it was the safest place to be, so, yeah, mixing with all the other children, older and younger children, and then, obviously, coming in it was very much again, protective mother, straight upstairs to bed, where we'd have some stories and a cuddle.

*Sarah: Do you think now as a parent, are there any links to your parenting? Does your parenting come into your approach at the nursery, or not?*

Hilary: Hmmm. I do find it - I remember when I was pregnant with my son, and all the parents here said "You're going to be a lovely mum. You're going to be a great mum. You're going to be a fantastic mum. You're going to be a brilliant mum."

And I remember thinking, “Oh, no, no, no. I’m so scared!” Because it is very different from having someone’s child for eight hours of the day, or ten hours of the day if you are doing a full day, to having your own child 24 hours of the day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, not only worrying about their health, their well-being, but clothes, money, food, shelter, education, everything else, is totally different!

*Sarah: So we don’t need to even bring it into...*

Hilary: No. I think - But I think Patcha always praises me as a mum. It’s really lovely and that gives you confidence in yourself. Because, when I look at how I have brought C up, he is a smart, funny, intelligent boy. He has never had any emotional issues. I’ve never had any behaviour issues. He’s never had any traumas in his life. I’ve kept him quite protective from that. And I think, seeing the relationship my mum had with my dad, I’ve always - it made me very strong as a woman. And as much as I found strength in my mum, I also found her very weak, the fact that she stayed there with him for so long. And I remember as a teenager, I said to her: “Why did you stay with him?” You know, he as an asshole (I don’t know if can swear), (*speaks quietly*) a wanker.” You know: “He wasn’t a father.” “How could you stay with him? Why could you not just pack your bags up and take us somewhere, take us back to Scotland to your sister? I mean, that’s... with you we had a life. With him, we didn’t.” And she said, “But children need a dad!” And I remember just sitting there thinking “That wasn’t a dad!” I’ve never had a dad. You know, I listen to my friends talk about their relationship with their mother and their father and how they had lovely family holidays. You know, and “My dad’s done this.” And “My dad’s taught me how to drive.” I’ve never had that. And, to be honest, I don’t think I would have wanted it from him anyway because it would have just been very false, because all the stuff my friends were talking about was when they were adults, or young adults, young teenagers, where a father maybe could communicate a little bit better with their child. Whereas, the life I had with my dad, I’d, yeah, I’d, to be honest - I mean, we’ve - The situation with my dad turned very violent with each other, where to a point I physically have stabbed him, and bottled him, out of protection to get away from him. And, yeah, and, so as I was saying, if he was burning in front of me I wouldn’t even pee on him. That’s how bad it was. And I remember saying to my mum: “You’ve kept us with him so that we could have a father, when it - All these years you’ve wasted. You could have gone on. You could have got yourself a job. You could

have met someone else. You could have been happy.” We, I mean, luckily, I think I am the only one who has turned out sane, semi-sane, (*laughs*) from the situation that we had. My mum has no confidence, has no self-esteem. She has no friends. My brother turned to drink and drugs for a few years until he met his lovely wife and she turned him around. But where with the situation I saw, as much as I respect my mum but I would never be my mum. I would never live with a man who would intimidate me that much, who knocked the self-esteem out of me. I would never have it. I would never have it. So, up to a point, I’ve used that, more so when my son came along, that, as much as I loved his dad, he wasn’t the person that I wanted as a role model for my son. He was weak. He was - If he didn’t get his way, he was very much a child. And then things did sort of deteriorate from there. As soon as I thought, “No, this relationship is turning into what my mum had,” I packed my bags and left, before my son could get any tense or traumas in his life. All those bad experiences, he’s never had them. Between me and my mum, it’s been a happy, happy, happy home life. And he is the proof. Because, even through his potty training and things like that, he’s never wet himself. You know, as soon as I’d made a decision: “He needs to come out of his nappy” I prepared him for the transition. When all the pants were bought, all the clothes were bought, not a problem. As soon as - He had a dummy when he was little. “Right, he’s coming up to two, it needs to go,” prepared him for it, the dummy went. There was no upset, no trauma. Both me and my mum were working in partnership together. Because again, I think, when you are in probably a father-mother relationship you always fight for what’s right for the child, whereas I think as a single parent, I made that decision and my mum worked with me. Whereas when you’ve got two parents - “Oh, well - No. Let’s start it next week.” There’s no consistency or one lets them get away - I am not saying that being a single parent is better than two parents, but I think, because I have been doing it on my own, I am the only one that my child needs to look to for support and - Am I going way off stream here?

*Sarah: No, because I think what you are talking about is family and how your family circumstances affected your approach to life, and your wanting to look after children. I think it is related, because you want to protect them. So that seems to be your definition, or what you are talking about when we talk about love.*

Hilary: It is very much protection and making every child grow in whichever way it is, and just respecting it. As I say, with C., he is my proof that I have been a great mum because he is happy and he is content and he is funny. He is also happy for me to go, but he's more so he's great to see me when I come back which shows that he has got the self confidence, that he doesn't need to be attached to me all the time.

*Sarah: Do you think you are able to apply that to the children in the nursery, that approach?*

Hilary: I think so, because it is very much from an early age giving them independence. And when the EYFS changed in 2008 it said that you had to offer children more self-choice and more freedom to express their own individual needs. I did think that was wonderful! Because, we are not dictated to as adults, when we eat, when we sleep, when we want a drink when we want a drink, so, why should we not treat them as adults as well? If a child is hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them water. If it's anything like snack bar. If we need to have snack by 10:30, no later. You know, a child might have come in at 10:00 o'clock and had a massive breakfast, so of course they are not going to be hungry or thirsty, so they miss out of those special nutrients of maybe fruit or vegetables, whereas if it is there available they can come whenever they are ready. And, again, it is making those own self choices, what they need to have later on in life and if they make a wrong choice... You know with that particular child. We've got one child here at the moment who you'll say: "Breakfast bar is going away in 10 minutes. Breakfast bar is going away in 5 minutes. Do you want to have breakfast now, because once it's gone, it's gone?" And then you start packing it up, you've put it away and the child will go: "I want breakfast." No. We've done it a few times. You've got to say: "Well look! We've put it away. We did tell you, and we did ask you. You're too late now and you'll have to wait until snack bar." And she's upset. She cries but it's learning that you have been told that breakfast bar is going. If you choose not to come when you are informed that is the choice that you have made, and that's what happens. That's the consequence of your actions.

*Sarah: So all the things that you are talking about, like supporting children to become independent, is that what you call love?*

Hilary: I do. I think love is not just about hugging them or kissing them or being there for them, it's helping children to grow, making sure that the choices that they make, whether they are right or wrong, you know, making them see that every action they do has a consequence. And just, again, not just being their friend, but, you know, also being a teacher as well and, making sure that the things that they choose in life will always affect what happens to them. You know, particularly this child was warned, she's been told, there was a countdown that breakfast was going away, breakfast was going away, breakfast was going away. As soon as it's gone away: "I'm hungry. I want breakfast." "Well you'll have to stay hungry now, because it's gone."

*Sarah: I'm sure she learned as a result*

Hilary: Yeah. She learned. It's hard love, but it's good love. Because next time when we went to her and said: "Breakfast is going away in five minutes. If you don't come now it will be gone like last time." "OK." And she came and she sat and she had breakfast.

*Sarah: Interesting. So it's about teaching them that hard love*

Hilary: Hard love. You've got to have both.

*Sarah: It's not, sort of... The other word you said. You said hard love or -*

Hilary: Tough love. Yeah.

*Sarah: How about supporting your team to adopt this approach? Do you ever use the word love?*

Hilary: Do you know? It's sort of - When you said that, I never actually have used it. Never, never used it. Never, never used it. We have, you know, I think when we've done interviews with new staff members that they have used that expression: "I love being with children! I love playing with children! Being with children make me happy!" and, you know, "I'm really good with children!" But I've never questioned it, which I think, for me... I will do now! I think when I do interview new staff I will say, if they bring that up, I will say: "Well how do you love children? Why do you love children?" You know -

*Sarah: Probe a little bit...*

Hilary: Probe a little bit more and see what their definition of love for children is, because I've never questioned a staff member. I've never, ever said to a member of staff: "You have to love the children." Mm. But I think, you know, when we have new staff, we observe them and we watch them and you pick up very quickly whether or not that person will be a good staff member or not. And even though we never use the word love, that is actually what probably gives them the job because you can see the love in their body movements. You can see, you know, that they are smiling at the children, that they are getting down at the children's level, and they are acknowledging that the child is there. If the child is coming up to them asking them for a hug, they are opening up their arms and taking that child in their arms. Whereas, if they doesn't love the child they freeze, they're frozen, they're so 'offish', they don't smile at what the child is doing. So, even if we never used "Do you love children/you don't love children?" it is generally there in your own persona, how you respond to children. Mm. I sit on a bus. I was going in to and fro to the council yesterday and on my second trip back this young girl got on with a baby and the baby - She pushed the baby on that part where you sit on the bus and the baby was first of all sitting back but then the baby started leaning forward and trying to grab. And I just thought: "Oh, you know, she is really trying!" And I was smiling at the baby. I wasn't smiling at the mum. I was smiling: "Oh God!", willing the child to come forward a little bit more. And the baby turned and saw me and smiled. Because I was smiling at the baby, the baby smiled back at me. So, you know. But, whereas you see some older women, sitting on the bus, "Tut, tut, tut!" very, you know, or if you're baby is crying. You think, "Oh, the poor baby, they're crying. They must be hungry! They must be thirsty." And you feel sorry for the mum because you know they must be stressed because they are on a public bus. And then "Tut, tut, tut." But those people that are 'tutting' don't love children, because if you had that nurture inside you, or if you were a mother, you'd feel for the mum because the baby's crying and they want to get home and it makes them more stressed. And because they get more stressed, the baby is more stressed. And all I particularly want to do is -

*Child: H!*

Hilary: Yes, darling?

*Child: I want to do 'puter.*



Hilary: Yes, darling. Mm. You know, you just want to go to the mum and say: “Look, it’s OK, big breath.” But you know you can’t because the moment you do that you know you’ll upset them even more.

*Sarah: So you are talking about a lot of empathy for children and mothers*

Hilary: Yes. Definitely, as well.

*Sarah: And a lot of sympathy with the mother. And I suppose, here, you do that work with families*

Hilary: You’re very much, within my role, an agony aunt.

*Sarah: Agony aunt*

Hilary: I think, in a manager’s position, and I think more so in a Key Person role as well, the relationship has grown, or does grow now very, very quickly. And I think, the fact that, one of the skills you’d have to have as a manager is being approachable so that if parents do have any issues at home they could come and speak to you. So, of course, you would get a range of family issues or family problems or - And it is great that they can come and speak to one, because if there is anything affecting the child, then you can pick up on it very, very quickly as well.

*S: So that is all about loving. It is much broader...*

It is, yeah. Because you have to be willing to listen to a parent to know what is right for the child as well

*Sarah: What you are describing is a very skilled role. I mean, you are not just talking about being nice. It is so much more going on. You are looking to the future, you’re understanding -*

Hilary: And helping out, sort of, in any way you can as well, whether it be listening. I mean, I had one parent who (this was last year) told her when we have just started, and the child who had real separation issues with the parent. And I said: “Well, you know, if you just come - Come in the office and have a cup of coffee. Bring a book. But, as long as you are here in the room, you know, the child can keep coming backwards and forwards and check that you are here and they feel more confidence and security with us, as a team.” And then one Mum was in here she, you know, after two or three days, you know, she really opened up to me. But, you know, she was suffering with depression, she was seeing the doctor, she wasn’t happy in her

marriage, her husband was gambling, they had to move back home with his parents. And just through those sort of, giving that parent time. It wasn't just about the child being settled, Mum had to also separate with the child, because Mum was having a great deal of separation anxiety from her child. So, you know, being able to give her that time and just being a pair of ears, and that, you know, making a cup of coffee for someone is great, a great start.

*Sarah: I completely agree*

Hilary: *(Laughs)* And, you know, being here, being available to the parent - I was able to get a lot more information about what, about the child and what is happening in the home life. Because, even though home visits are great, you don't really get the ins and outs. There's always still very much a show. The house is always clean. It's all happy, happy, happy, happy. And then, suddenly, something comes out, over a cup of coffee, which you find out: "Oh! I didn't know that!" And, of course, you wouldn't know that because it is not something you can see. To know that someone has financial worries or domestic problems or anything like that you don't see it during the home visits. You can't pick it up. And then obviously not all child protection cases are about children. It could just be the mum, as for example, us. It wasn't us, it was just my mum, so obviously the social worker never got involved with us because it was all kept hidden behind closed doors, which is still a stigma today. There's not a lot of women who do come forward about violence in the home, mm, so, of course, during the home visit she hadn't. So, just being able to - And having parent coffee mornings as well, which as well is a great thing, because we have them here as well.

*Sarah: Lovely*

Hilary: So when parents come, they just say one little word, and you think: "Mm." And then, you might not approach it then, but you can approach it next time. And, I think, you know, picking up on a key word as well. And again, this helps the children, which is what, for me my main goal is. Helping the parents and, more so, helping the children.

*Sarah: You help the parents in order to help the child*

Hilary: Yeah.

*Sarah: And all of that is encompassed by that word love*

Hilary: Yeah.

*Sarah: So it's an immensely complex...*

Hilary: It's, again - It is maybe even teaching a parent to love a child. You have got a high number of young mums today who have to spend, not even, have not even finished school, mmm, and if they've had a bad experience in their upbringing as well they might not know how to show love to their child. They might just think: "Stick a dummy in its mouth and put it in a push chair." And "Oh, designer clothes"- And, you know, that's, that's fine. But, you know, again, having an open door, showing parents how to play with their children, you know, inviting the parents to come in for settling-in sessions, so they can see the staff playing, interacting with children as well, so it's, you know, love is not just hugs and kisses, it's, it has a very big, outer look. I am trying to think of some good words to use.

*Sarah: So it sounds as if you do a tremendously skilled job, and that love is a complex, important part of your work.*

Hilary: Yeah.

*Sarah: But, how do you, do you see anything in the policies or the documentation that supports you to love children, or - ?*

Hilary: There is nothing anywhere in our policy that states that we have to love a child. The one policy that we do have is the Rights of The Child, that the child has the right to do what they want, to do what they want, and so forth, but, even then, there is nothing there that says a staff member has to love a child. But I think if you are going to work with children it has to be seen now as being one of the highest priorities within this job. Not just qualifications, because, again, anyone can get a piece of paper. You know, anyone can train for three years. And you do see it, actually, as a manager! I mean, I have had staff who have come for an interview, and they have a Foundation Degree in Early Years, and then you say: "Well, what work experience have you had?" and they'll go: "Oh, well, I did a week in this nursery and a week in that nursery, and then I did another week in this nursery." And I go, "OK." And then I can get someone who has done maybe a whole year in a nursery but is working towards her NVQ Level 2 - And I've always - It's something that I introduced personally myself, many years ago. Stage 1 of an interview is with myself and the Area Manager. And then I introduced Stage 2 where, if they've passed our

interview. If they have to have an interview with the children. And, basically, that interview is just playing for two hours with the children.

*Sarah: Lovely*

Hilary: So, you know, and again, you could check all the paperwork. You can check their references and their qualifications. But again, as I said earlier, when that person goes out onto the floor, if they are naturally good with the children, then you know they love children. If they were to go out there and just sit and snarl and wrinkle their nose up, then you know this is not a person you want in your nursery. And you do see that, because I know when I am employing new staff, I want to see my staff getting involved, getting down and dirty, laughing, giggling, having a bit of a joke - This is not just a case of this is a nine to five job where we make sure the children are fed and watered and have their nappies changed. It's not that at all. This is not what - This is not my expectation. My expectations of a person who works with children is to have fun, have enjoyment, to have a giggle, to show children different types of emotion. So, if you're having a bad day, tell the children you're having a bad day! So, if you're husband pissed you off at home and upset you, tell the children! You know, that is an emotion that you have and you have every right to express that emotion and show that emotion, so that when they have that emotion, they know that it's OK to show it and express it. If you're having a giggle, have a giggle. Teach the children how to talk and have social skills and communication skills so that the children can do that as well. So, I mean, yeah, everything, so, yeah. OK?

*Sarah: Very, very, very useful. You've talked about a lot of things. So, what I'll do now is go back and write it all out*

Hilary: Yeah. I do feel like I've rambled a bit (*Laughs*)

*Sarah: You haven't*

Hilary: I kind of feel that I've gone from -

*Sarah: No, it's fine. So what I'll do is I'll type it all up and see if there is anything I want to come back and talk about a little bit further. Is that alright?*

Hilary: That's fine.

*Sarah: But, anyway, thank you very much!*

## Appendix 3 – Extract of colour coded transcript with notes

### Angela's (M.'s) transcript with notes

**Key words:** 'think' (x100), 'care' or 'caring' or 'look after' or 'looking after' (x18), 'emotional' (x10), 'love' (only x3 – uses euphemisms for love, including 'care', 'bond', 'warm relations', 'emotional link')

Transcript	Notes
<p><i>S: I'll prompt you as we go along.</i></p> <p>OK. I think we feel very strongly here that that kind of emotional link with children is very central to what we do and that it's, for children, that kind of emotional connection with other people is very important in their development. I don't know if we always kind of think of it as love, or call it, or label it as love, but then in a sense that is sort of what it is. Perhaps we use other words, like 'bond' or something because that is more of a charged word, it's more about a family. And also that, you know, it's got a lot of other sort of connotations so perhaps we would be a bit wary of using that word but actually when you think about what it is, it is about a kind of caring about the children and caring about them as people alongside caring about them as learners. There's a relationship there, and it's a kind of relationship because it's not the same as a parent's relationship because there's a sort of limit to it, and it's, you know, at the end of the day, even though sometimes you think about the children there is a sort of, at this sort of point, there is a sort of stop in it and then after a year or so they move up and then they move on, and so it's as though... And again, you sort of sometimes will see the children later and it will be nice to see them again but there are edges to it, sort of boundaries to it, but when you are actually sort of together in this nursery that's the sort of relationship that it is.</p>	<p>Love as an emotional link:</p> <p>Teacher and child</p> <p>Child and others</p> <p>Love as a bond</p> <p>Not the same as familial love</p> <p>Care for children as people</p> <p>Relationship</p> <p>Not familial love</p> <p>Limits</p> <p>Edges</p> <p>Boundaries</p>
<p><i>S: So it's complex sort of emotional feeling or relationship. It's not just.... It's got some caring as you mentioned, and bonding, and it's got limits, but you also said it is about learning.</i></p> <p>Yes. It is. Because I think there is a sort of idea that you care about them as a whole person and that you want to see them develop in lots of different ways. You want to see them develop in a kind of academic sort of way but you want</p>	<p>Love for the future</p>

## Appendix 4 – Sheet of helplines to take to interviews

### Help

You may receive some help through one of the following organisations:

**NHS Direct**

Tel: 0845 46 47

Website: [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

**Samaritans**

Tel: 08457 909090

For confidential emotional support for people in crisis 24 hours a day

Website: [www.samaritans.org.uk](http://www.samaritans.org.uk)

**Mental Health Foundation**

Tel: 020 7535 7439

Website: [www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

**British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)**

Tel: 01788 578328

For lists of UK counsellors and psychotherapists

Website: [www.counselling.co.uk](http://www.counselling.co.uk)

**British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP)**

Tel: 01254 875277

For information on CBT and a list of trained CBT therapists

Website: [www.babcp.com](http://www.babcp.com)

**British Confederation of Psychotherapists (BCP)**

Tel: 020 8830 5173

For a list of trained psychotherapists

Website: [www.bcp.org.uk](http://www.bcp.org.uk)

**British Psychological Society (BPS)**

Tel: 0116 254 9568

For a directory of chartered psychologists

Website: [www.bps.org.uk](http://www.bps.org.uk)

**UK Council of Psychotherapy (UKCP)**

Tel: 020 7436 3002

For information about psychotherapy and UK psychotherapists

Website: [www.psychotherapy.org.uk](http://www.psychotherapy.org.uk)

**British Complementary Medicine Association (BCMA)**

Tel: 020 7231 5855

For organisations and individual practitioners of alternative & complementary medicine

Website: [www.icmedicine.co.uk](http://www.icmedicine.co.uk)

## Appendix 5 – Details of research visits

Participant	Date of first visit – interview	Date of second visit – mapping	Time of day	Location
<b>Hilary</b>	April 2012	July 2012	10:00 am	Manager's office, Private Voluntary and Independent setting
<b>Kathleen</b>	April 2012	July 2012	3:30 pm	Nursery classroom, Roman Catholic Primary School
<b>Ana</b>	April 2012	July 2012	3:30 pm	Meeting room, Children's Centre
<b>Angela</b>	May 2012	July 2012	3:30 pm	Meeting room, Nursery School
<b>Flori</b>	June 2012	July 2012	2:00 pm	Kitchen, own-home setting



## Appendix 6 – Some writing about my childhood

### A childhood vignette

I experienced my early childhood in the outskirts of Buenos Aires, in Argentina. In those days the country was run by a military dictatorship, but I was hardly aware of this. I played outside with my siblings and other children in the neighbourhood. There was music and sunshine and time, I remember. The political backdrop, however, had an impact on the quality and approach of education and care I received.

At school I remember standing in line every morning to salute the national flag and sing the national anthem. “Oid mortales el grito sagrado, Libertad, Libertad, Libertad!” (Listen mortals to the sacred cry: Freedom, Freedom, Freedom!) And yet, freedom was not what we were given. I remember rows of desks, teachers in white overalls, discipline, corridors, uniforms, obedience.

My family belonged to a small British community. I attended a ‘Kindergarten’ run by a British woman, in her home. Here, too, I experienced another set of values, another cultural interpretation of the purposes of education. I was on the receiving end of an imported version of British schooling from an earlier era. There were no playthings, only dedicated, disembedded play-times in the garden, apart from the school room. I sensed that my left-handedness was an inconvenience to my teacher. We sat at a long table to learn to write. My left elbow interrupted the pattern, I felt.

## **Outdoor memories**

*(a personal response to some of my research participants' stories)*

Sit on the porch  
Just outside the house  
Feel the warm tiles  
Under the open roof

Sit on the porch  
Alone or with a friend  
Feel the mat tiles  
Terracotta  
    Warm  
            Memories of being  
In outdoor spaces  
Near to the house  
Not far away

Sitting  
    Silent  
        Waiting  
            Warm

Sounds of siblings and neighbours  
Playing in nearby spaces

See your mother gardening  
Outside  
Or hear her inside  
Winding your grandmother's sewing machine

In that faraway land  
Of learning

## **I went away**

I went away  
I left home  
Went far away  
Across the equator  
To another land

I was twelve  
I spoke English  
Spanish no longer  
Wisconsin was strange  
Not like Buenos Aires

My friends gone  
I felt alone  
I stopped talking  
My friends gone  
Not with me

I liked Maths  
I liked shops  
I liked, What?

I felt alone  
It was new  
I was young

I liked waffles  
And maple syrup  
My small room

Aurora was gone  
Neighbours were new  
Tree house gone  
Silence felt good

Long time ago  
Still in me  
I swapped places  
Long time ago  
The landscape changed  
Long time ago  
Still feels hard

Part of me  
Who I am  
Inside of me

Write it down  
Write it down  
Down, Write it

(Part I of a poem written in May 2014 during a workshop led by Laurel Richardson at  
the 10<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, Illinois)



COVER SHEET

I confirm that in my judgment, due to the project's nature, the use of a method to inform prospective participants about the project (eg 'Information Sheet'/'Covering Letter'/'Pre-Written Script'):	
Is relevant	Is <u>not</u> relevant
X (if relevant then this should be enclosed)	

I confirm that in my judgment, due to the project's nature, the use of a 'Consent Form':	
Is relevant	Is <u>not</u> relevant
X (if relevant then this should be enclosed)	

Is this a 'generic "en bloc" application (ie does it cover more than one project that is sufficiently similar)	
Yes	No

I am a member of staff

☐

I am a PhD/EdD student

☒

I am a Master's student

☐

I am an Undergraduate student

☐

I am a PGCE student

☐

The submission of this ethics application has been agreed by my supervisor

☐

Supervisor's signature/name and date of agreement

.....  
.....

I have enclosed a signed copy of Part B

☐

**University of Sheffield School of Education**  
**RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATION FORM**

**PART A**

**A1. Title of Research Project**

**To the heart of the matter: stories and poems about love as a gift in children's out-of-own-homes education and care contexts**

**A2. Applicant (normally the Principal Investigator, in the case of staff-led research projects, or the student in the case of supervised research projects):**

Title: Mrs First Name/Initials: S.B. Last Name: Cousins  
 Post: EdD student Department: Education  
 Email: edp09sbh@sheffield.ac.uk Telephone: 07805627838

**A2.1. Is this a student project?**

If yes, please provide the Supervisor's contact details: Jools Page,  
 j.m.page@sheffield.ac.uk

**A2.2. Other key investigators/co-applicants (within/outside University), where applicable:**

Please list all (add more rows if necessary)

Title	Full Name	Post	Responsibility in project	Organisation	Department

**A3. Proposed Project Duration:**

Start date: January 2012 End date: September 2013

**A4. Mark 'X' in one or more of the following boxes if your research:**

<input type="checkbox"/>	Involves children or young people aged under 18 years
<input type="checkbox"/>	Involves only identifiable personal data with no direct contact with participants
<input type="checkbox"/>	Involves only anonymised or aggregated data
<input type="checkbox"/>	Involves prisoners or others in custodial care (eg young offenders)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Involves adults with mental incapacity or mental illness
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Has the primary aim of being educational (eg student research, a project necessary for a postgraduate degree or diploma, MA, PhD or EdD)

**A5. Briefly summarise the project's aims, objectives and methodology?**

(this must be in language comprehensible to a lay person)

This project explores how Early Years practitioners feel able or supported to love young children in out-of-their-own-homes education and care contexts. Page (2011) suggests that there is a need to talk about of 'professional love' (2011) in Early Years contexts. This research adopts a narrative inquiry approach to explore this theme. I intend to pose a comment or phrase to serve as a stimulus for practitioners to give accounts of their perceptions and experiences of loving the children in their care. Due to the abstract and deep nature of the subject matter, the project will, in sections, use poetry to present issues and insights. This poetic form will constitute the project's main contribution to research. The research will unpick some of the language of policies and professional standards and suggest that a more poetic expression and form may more closely convey this deeper layer within the role of Early Years practitioners. The research will on occasions and as appropriate distil the discussions into poetry.

**A6. What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm / distress to participants?**

I am planning to conduct interviews and therefore there is a risk that, due to the nature of the research, the participants may be prompted to recall their own experiences as children, which may be painful or difficult. Additionally, delicate or sensitive situations with families and children may come to the surface. It is possible that subjects such as these could lead to emotional outbursts or troubled states.

I will take steps to establish a comfortable and trusting atmosphere in order to limit any feelings of vulnerability. Additionally, I will research and prepare a list of local and national support agencies and self-help groups to which participants may turn for further support.

In the event that a participant should make a disclosure or I become concerned about a child's welfare as a result of the discussions, I will contact the head of the setting, the parents or social services, as appropriate and without delay. This course of action will be communicated to the participants before the beginning of the research activity.

**A7. Does your research raise any issues of personal safety for you or other researchers involved in the project and, if yes, explain how these issues will be managed? (Especially if taking place outside working hours or off University premises.)**

I will conduct the narrative interviews with participants at times and in locations to suit the participants. This may be in the evenings, after the settings have closed. In these situations, I will ensure that we meet in public spaces, such as a library, café or centre.

**A8. How will the potential participants in the project be (i) identified, (ii) approached and (iii) recruited?**

The nature of carrying out deep level interviews means that I may be returning to the participants quite regularly to gather their stories and build their narratives. Sessions will be arranged between once a month and once every three months for no longer than an hour each time, and will take place between January and July 2012. The nature of the project, therefore, necessitates a small number of participants. To this end, I will select a small sample of no more than eight participants. I am intending to choose participants that represent different out-of-home education and care contexts



within the Early Years sector. As I have identified several participants who are already known to me and who have already indicated an interest in my project, I will arrange a telephone conversation via email. I will briefly explain the nature of the research and seek an expression of interest over the telephone, then arrange pre-research meetings with individual participants. At this meeting, I will firstly seek participants' formal consent, assuring them of the opportunity to withdraw from the project at any stage; secondly, provide an information sheet detailing the process; and, thirdly, give participants an opportunity to ask questions.

My selection of participants will be from the set of practitioners known to me in my previous role as Early Years consultant for a Local Authority. The rationale for this selection is, firstly, that there is no longer a professional connection between me and the practitioners; secondly, there are no family or close friendship connections between me and the practitioners; and, thirdly, I feel comfortable in the settings at which they work, particularly in relation to their respectful and professional relationships with children and parents.

**A9. Will informed consent be obtained from the participants?**

Yes

No

<input checked="checked" type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>

**If informed consent is not to be obtained please explain why.** Further guidance is at <http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/researchethics/policy-notes/consent> Only under exceptional circumstances are studies without informed consent permitted. Students should consult their tutors.

**A.9.1 How do you plan to obtain informed consent? (i.e. the proposed process?):**

Participants will learn about the project via email and then at a pre-research meeting, at which they will be fully informed about the processes involved, the time commitment required and the details about the dissemination of the project. The consent will be given verbally, and in writing on an information sheet and written consent will be gained via a participant consent form during this informal, unhurried session.

**A.10 How will you ensure appropriate protection and well-being of participants?**

- I will prepare a list of local and national self-referral help agencies to offer to practitioners at point of need, should they display any sign of distress or discomfort
- I will offer to lead a post-research meeting to continue any discussions, as required

**A.11 What measures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data, where appropriate?**

I will make a summary statement about the research process at the beginning of each narrative interview meeting. The statement will emphasise the steps I will take to keep all names and any other traceable details, such as birth dates of children and names of settings, anonymous, e.g. by translating real labels into fictional ones. I will keep the digital recorder and notebook safely with me on my return journey and download all recordings onto a fixed hard-drive in the immediate short term. I will ensure that the names of participants and any traceable details (e.g. names or post codes of settings) do not appear in the research paperwork and final project.

**A.12 Will financial / in kind payments (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants? (Indicate how much and on what basis this has been decided.)**

Yes

<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------

No



**A.13 Will the research involve the production of recorded or photographic media such as audio and/or video recordings or photographs?**

**Yes**

**No**

<input checked="checked" type="radio"/>

**A.13.1** This question is only applicable if you are planning to produce recorded or visual media:

**How will you ensure that there is a clear agreement with participants as to how these recorded media or photographs may be stored, used and (if appropriate) destroyed?**

**PART B - THE SIGNED DECLARATION**

I confirm my responsibility to deliver the research project in accordance with the University of Sheffield's policies and procedures, which include the University's '*Financial Regulations*', '*Good research Practice Standards*' and the '*Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants, Data and Tissue*' (Ethics Policy) and, where externally funded, with the terms and conditions of the research funder.

**In signing this research ethics application I am confirming that:**

1. The above-named project will abide by the University's Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants, Data and Tissue':  
<http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/researchethics/index.html>
2. The above-named project will abide by the University's 'Good Research Practice Standards': <http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/other/gov-ethics/researchethics/general-principles/homepage.html>
3. The research ethics application form for the above-named project is accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.
4. There is no potential material interest that may, or may appear to, impair the independence and objectivity of researchers conducting this project.
5. Subject to the research being approved, I undertake to adhere to the project protocol without unagreed deviation and to comply with any conditions set out in the letter from the University ethics reviewers notifying me of this.
6. I undertake to inform the ethics reviewers of significant changes to the protocol (by contacting my supervisor or the Ethics Administrator as appropriate
7. I am aware of my responsibility to be up to date and comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data, including the need to register when necessary with the appropriate Data Protection Officer (within the University the Data Protection Officer is based in CICS).
8. I understand that the project, including research records and data, may be subject to inspection for audit purposes, if required in future.
9. I understand that personal data about me as a researcher in this form will be held by those involved in the ethics review procedure (eg the Ethics Administrator and/or ethics reviewers/supervisors) and that this will be managed according to Data Protection Act principles.
10. If this is an application for a 'generic'/'en block' project all the individual projects that fit under the generic project are compatible with this application.
11. I will inform the Chair of Ethics Review Panel if prospective participants make a complaint about the above-named project.

**Signature of student (student application):**

**Signature of staff (staff application):**

**Date: 9<sup>th</sup> December, 2011**

**Email the completed application form to the course/programme secretary**

**For staff projects contact the Ethics Secretary, Colleen Woodward  
Email: [c.woodward@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:c.woodward@sheffield.ac.uk) for details of how to submit**

## **Research Project Title**

To the heart of the matter: Stories and poems about love as a gift in children's out-of-own-homes education and care contexts

## **Invitation paragraph**

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

## **What is the project's purpose?**

The aim of the project is to gather accounts from Early Years practitioners about their relationships with young children in out of their own homes contexts. Do practitioners feel able to love the children in their care? Is this part of their role, and if so, how are they supported with this? How do parents feel about this closeness with their children?

## **Why have I been chosen?**

There will be a total of eight participants in the project. You have been chosen because you work at one of a range of contrasting setting types, e.g. children's centre, Private Voluntary and Independent setting, childminder's own home. I know about this setting through my previous connections and work in the local authority.

## **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time. You do not have to give a reason.

## **What will happen to me if I take part?**

You will be involved in the research for a period of up to 9 months. The research process will continue until September 2013 and, over that period, you will be kept informed about developments. You will be required to participate between once a month and once every three months for no longer than an hour each time. I will make the arrangements with you by email, and agree times and places to suit you, for example, in the evening, at your setting, in your home or at any other suitable venue of your choice.

At each session I will ask you some questions about your work. You will be encouraged to give me your accounts about different aspects of your work. You will not have to prepare anything in advance. I will be using a narrative methodology, whereby I pose questions or prompts, and you give me your response in return. It does not matter if you do not know what to say. I will prompt you further. All you will be required to do is talk about your work in your own words. You do not need to answer all the questions.

## **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

There is a risk that, due to the nature of the research, you may be prompted to recall your own experiences as a child. This could be painful or difficult. Additionally, delicate or sensitive situations with families and children may come to the surface. There is a danger that you could become upset.

I will try to establish a relaxing and informal atmosphere. I will also carry a list of local and national support agencies and self-help groups to which you may turn for further support.

Please be advised that, in the event that should make a disclosure or I become concerned about a child's welfare as a result of the discussions, I will contact the appropriate person or services without delay.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that you will enjoy your involvement and take an interest in the research outcomes. I will give you a copy of the research when it is finished, and you may wish to let me know about further developments at any time after the research.

### **What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?**

If, for any reason, I need to terminate the research earlier than expected, I will give you a full explanation of the circumstances.

### **What if something goes wrong?**

I fully expect the process to be a positive one at all stages. However, in the unlikely event that something does go wrong, and you are dissatisfied with my approach, you may contact my research supervisor, Jools Page, [j.m.page@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:j.m.page@sheffield.ac.uk). If you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, you may contact the Registrar and Secretary, Philip Harvey, Office of Registrar and Secretary, University of Sheffield, Firth Court, Western Bank, Sheffield, S10 2TN, 01142221100, [registrar@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:registrar@sheffield.ac.uk)

### **Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

All the information that I collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. I will take care to abide by the legal and regulatory requirements in relation to collecting and using data.

### **What will happen to the results of the research project?**

The results of the research will be published for the University of Sheffield at the end of my study period. I will send you a summary version of the project findings, and let you know which section of the thesis you are involved in. Once again, please be reassured that you will not be identified in any report or publication. There is a possibility that the data I collect may be used for additional or subsequent research. I will let you know if this is the case, and where to access the research outcomes.

### **Who is organising and funding the research?**

This research is supervised by the education team at the University of Sheffield, where I am a student on the EdD Early Childhood Education programme. I am sponsored by London Metropolitan University.

**Who has ethically reviewed the project?**

This project has been ethically approved via the School of Education at the University of Sheffield. The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

**Contact for further information**

Please get in touch with me at any stage if you would like further information about the research project: [sarahbcousins@gmail.com](mailto:sarahbcousins@gmail.com), 37 Roderick Road, London, NW3 2NP, 07805627838.

My supervisor is Jools Page: [j.m.page@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:j.m.page@sheffield.ac.uk)

Please keep this information sheet together with the signed consent form.

**Thank you very much for participating in my project!**



## Research Participant Consent Form

**Title of Project:**

To the heart of the matter: stories and poems about love as a gift in children's out-of-own-homes education and care contexts

**Name of Researcher:** Sarah Cousins

Participant Identification Number for this project: **001516107**

**initial box**

**Please**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 8th December, 2011, for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. I may contact the researcher at any time on 07805 627838
3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.
4. I agree to take part in the above research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Sarah Cousins  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Lead Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

*To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*

Copies:

Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form and the information sheet. A copy for the signed and dated consent form will be placed in the project's main record (e.g. a site file), which will be kept in a secure location.

--

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To the heart of the matter: stories and poems about love as a gift in children's out-of-own-homes education and care contexts

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\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Sarah Cousins

\_\_\_\_\_  
Lead Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
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--

## **Research Information Sheet**

### **Research Project Title**

To the heart of the matter: Stories and poems about love as a gift in children's out-of-own-homes education and care contexts

### **Invitation paragraph**

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does not matter if you do not know what to say. I will prompt you further. All you will be required to do is talk about your work in your own words. You do not need to answer all the questions.

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

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### **What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?**

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I fully expect the process to be a positive one at all stages. However, in the unlikely event that something does go wrong, and you are dissatisfied with my approach, you may contact my research supervisor, Jools Page, [j.m.page@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:j.m.page@sheffield.ac.uk). If you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, you may contact the Registrar and Secretary, Philip Harvey, Office of Registrar and Secretary, University of Sheffield, Firth Court, Western Bank, Sheffield, S10 2TN, 01142221100, [registrar@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:registrar@sheffield.ac.uk)

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### **Contact for further information**

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My supervisor is Jools Page: [j.m.page@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:j.m.page@sheffield.ac.uk)

Please keep this information sheet together with the signed consent form.

**Thank you very much for participating in my project!**

## Help

You may receive some help through one of the following organisations:

### **NHS Direct**

Tel: 0845 46 47

Website: [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

### **Samaritans**

Tel: 08457 909090

For confidential emotional support for people in crisis 24 hours a day

Website: [www.samaritans.org.uk](http://www.samaritans.org.uk)

### **Mental Health Foundation**

Tel: 020 7535 7439

Website: [www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

### **British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)**

Tel: 01788 578328

For lists of UK counsellors and psychotherapists

Website: [www.counselling.co.uk](http://www.counselling.co.uk)

### **British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP)**

Tel: 01254 875277

For information on CBT and a list of trained CBT therapists

Website: [www.babcp.com](http://www.babcp.com)

### **British Confederation of Psychotherapists (BCP)**

Tel: 020 8830 5173

For a list of trained psychotherapists

Website: [www.bcp.org.uk](http://www.bcp.org.uk)

### **British Psychological Society (BPS)**

Tel: 0116 254 9568

For a directory of chartered psychologists

Website: [www.bps.org.uk](http://www.bps.org.uk)

### **UK Council of Psychotherapy (UKCP)**

Tel: 020 7436 3002

For information about psychotherapy and UK psychotherapists

Website: [www.psychotherapy.org.uk](http://www.psychotherapy.org.uk)

### **British Complementary Medicine Association (BCMA)**

Tel: 020 7231 5855

For organisations and individual practitioners of alternative & complementary medicine

Website: [www.icmedicine.co.uk](http://www.icmedicine.co.uk)

Sarah Cousins  
EdD Early Childhood Education

**Head of School**  
Professor Jackie Marsh

Department of Educational Studies  
388 Glossop Road  
Sheffield  
S10 2JA

07 September 2015

**Telephone:** +44 (0)114 222 8096  
**Email:** Jacquie.gillott@sheffield.ac.uk

Dear Sarah

**ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER**

**To the heart of the matter: stories and poems about love as a gift in children's out-of-own-homes education and care contexts**

Thank you for submitting your ethics application. I am writing to confirm that your application has now been approved, and you can proceed with your research.

This letter is evidence that your application has been approved and should be included as an Appendix in your final submission.

Good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely



Dr Simon Warren  
**Chair of the School of Education Ethics Review Panel**

cc Jools Page